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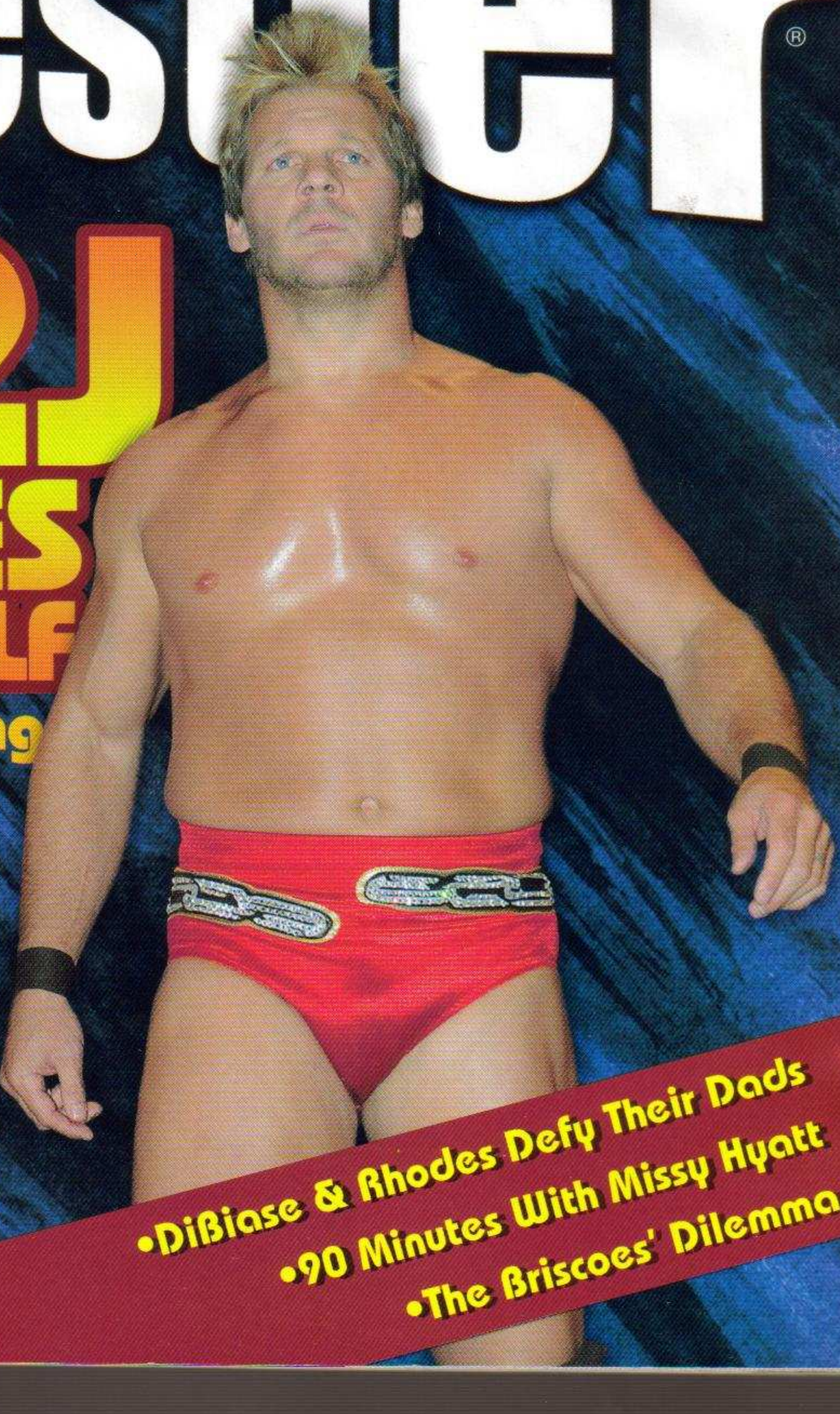

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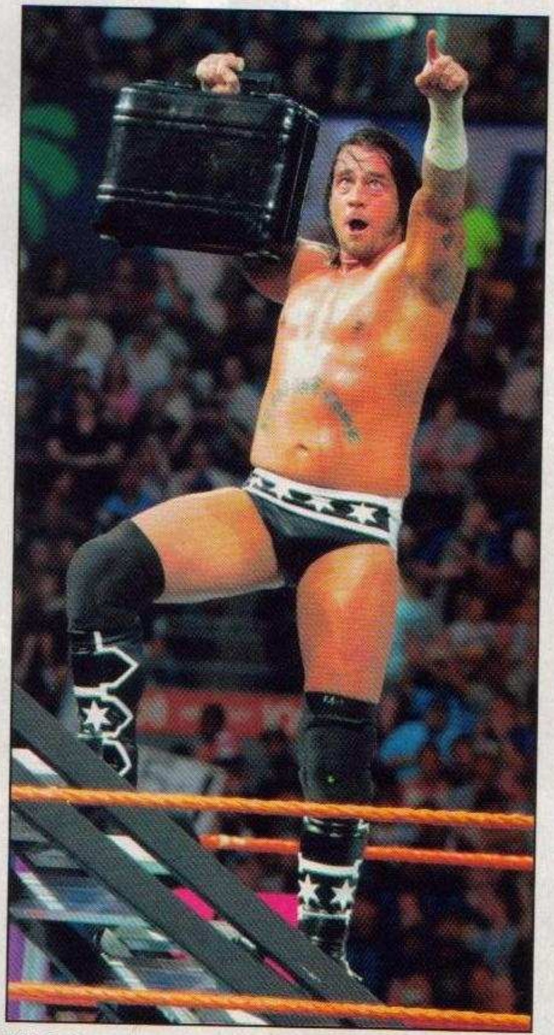
YOUR LETTERS



C.M. Punk said he wanted to be known as a straight-edge superstar. But his timing and tactics to win the World championship from Edge were kind of crooked. Reader Ernie Wilson of Chicago, Illinois, says the way Chris Jericho won the World title at Unforgiven was only fitting.

JUSTICE SERVED

I recently read "Krew-Cuts" (Volume 24, 2008) and I totally agree with Frank Krewda, who wrote about how C.M. Punk didn't want to be known as a champion who keeps the title through cheap means. "Funny, but he didn't seem to mind *winning* the title through cheap means," said Krewda. Could the man be any more correct?

These are the same sentiments I have been feeling and trying to get across to my friends for months. For a man who has cheated Batista out of the title on more than one occasion, I have to say it was great to see the title cheaply taken from him at Unforgiven. As they say, "Easy come, easy go." Punk was exposed as a non-deserving champion at Unforgiven. Hopefully, Chris Jericho will be able to fend off Punk in the inevitable rematch and remove him from the Raw title scene for good. He certainly doesn't belong there!

ERNIE WILSON
Chicago, IL

FLIPPED ON FOLEY

As I was flipping between college football and TNA *Impact* the other night, something out of the ordinary caught my eye, Mick Foley. I had no idea the hardcore legend was making his way to TNA, and personally, I couldn't be more excited.

I can remember watching those famous hardcore matches as a kid, the ones with all the barbed wire and blood. Adding Foley into the TNA mix, especially with the Kurt Angle scenario, is absolutely perfect. I cannot wait to see how Foley will play into this whole scheme.

JOSH RICKARD
New York, NY

WHY'D SHE DO IT?

As a woman, I can't understand where Layla El is coming from. She spends all her time with Jamie Noble, talks to him, hangs out with him, valets for him, and watches him go out there and fight to impress her week after week ... and then she dumps him for William Regal? What are you thinking, girl?

I couldn't imagine treating someone who has tried to do so much for me like that, especially not for William Regal. Isn't he old enough to be her father? For Jamie Noble's sake, I hope he just moves on and finds someone who actually cares back. For Layla, I hope she gets what she deserves in the end.

TANYA SMITH
Boise, ID

THE GENIOUS BEHIND DDP

I read the "Diamond" Dallas Page interview ("Q & A," Volume 24, 2008) and I was shocked. All these years, I just figured DDP was a normal guy who got his start just like any other wrestler. I never realized he worked so hard or came up with so many different ideas.

I was surprised to read how he'd tape all of his

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As the manager for The Diamond Exchange, Page convinced Scott Hall to drop his mustache and stirrups to become "The Diamond Studd." This persona eventually led to Hall's most famous persona, Razor Ramon. Reader Terry Davis of Perth Amboy, New Jersey, was surprised to learn of DDP's unique contributions to the industry.

matches or that people thought he was a "wuss" because he iced himself down after shows, or that he came up with the Razor Ramon persona. Mindblowing.

I could always tell DDP put in a little bit more effort than some of the guys he wrestled. It's really great to see him getting his story out there and maybe enjoying some more recognition because of it.

TERRY DAVIS
Perth Amboy, NJ

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

With all due respect to Brent Albright and Adam Pearce, I must say that I am extremely disappointed with the NWA for allowing the title to change hands on what was essentially a Ring of Honor show, held in New York, of all places. Yes, both men are worthy wrestlers and I know Albright frequently wrestles on NWA cards. But to allow the belt to change hands in this manner is a slap in the face of all the former NWA champions who have worn it.

Albright and Pearce put on quite a match at the Hammerstein Ballroom from what I've been told. But do you think Lou Thesz or Gene Kiniski would have given some small-time promotion a chance to walk away with his championship belt? I doubt it.

I have nothing against Ring of Honor or its wrestlers, but the NWA has a long, storied history, and the organization all but flushed it down the toilet by getting in bed with what is essentially a renegade independent organization.

PAUL BLUNTON
Northfield, MN ☐

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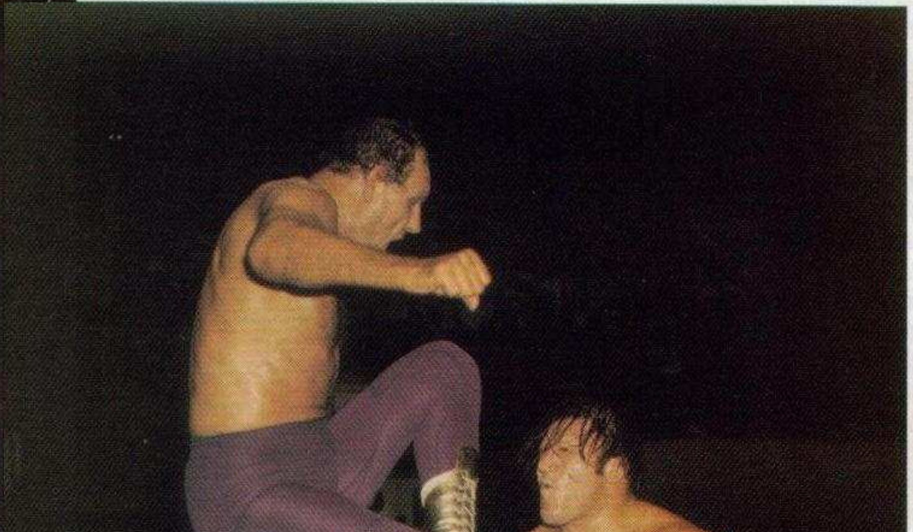
WHAT'S HAPPENING

BY BRADY HICKS

ON AUGUST 30, the wrestling world lost a man who truly defined the word "legend." **Walter "Killer" Kowalski**, born **Edward Walter Spulnik**, passed away after complications from a massive heart attack suffered on August 8. With a Hall-of-Fame career that spanned 30 years, Kowalski was known for bringing a fierce in-ring style to the NWA, AWA, and WWWF.



A killer in the ring and gentleman out if it, Edward Walter Spulnik—better known as Killer Kowalski—died on August 30, weeks after suffering a massive heart attack. Kowalski's battles with Bruno Sammartino were classics.

In 1952, during a match with **Yukon Eric**, Kowalski jumped from the top rope and landed on Eric's ear, ripping it clean from his head. When it was reported in the newspapers that Kowalski had gone to the hospital to see Eric, and laughed at him, he was dubbed "Killer," a name that stuck with him throughout his entire career. Kowalski is also famed for kicking special guest referee and former boxing great **Jack Dempsey** in the diaphragm during a 1958 match with **Pat O'Connor**. Dempsey had to be hospitalized for several days.

Despite his reputation for violence, Kowalski was a kind and warm person outside of the ring according to Theresa, his wife of nearly two years (he married for the first time at the age of 79).

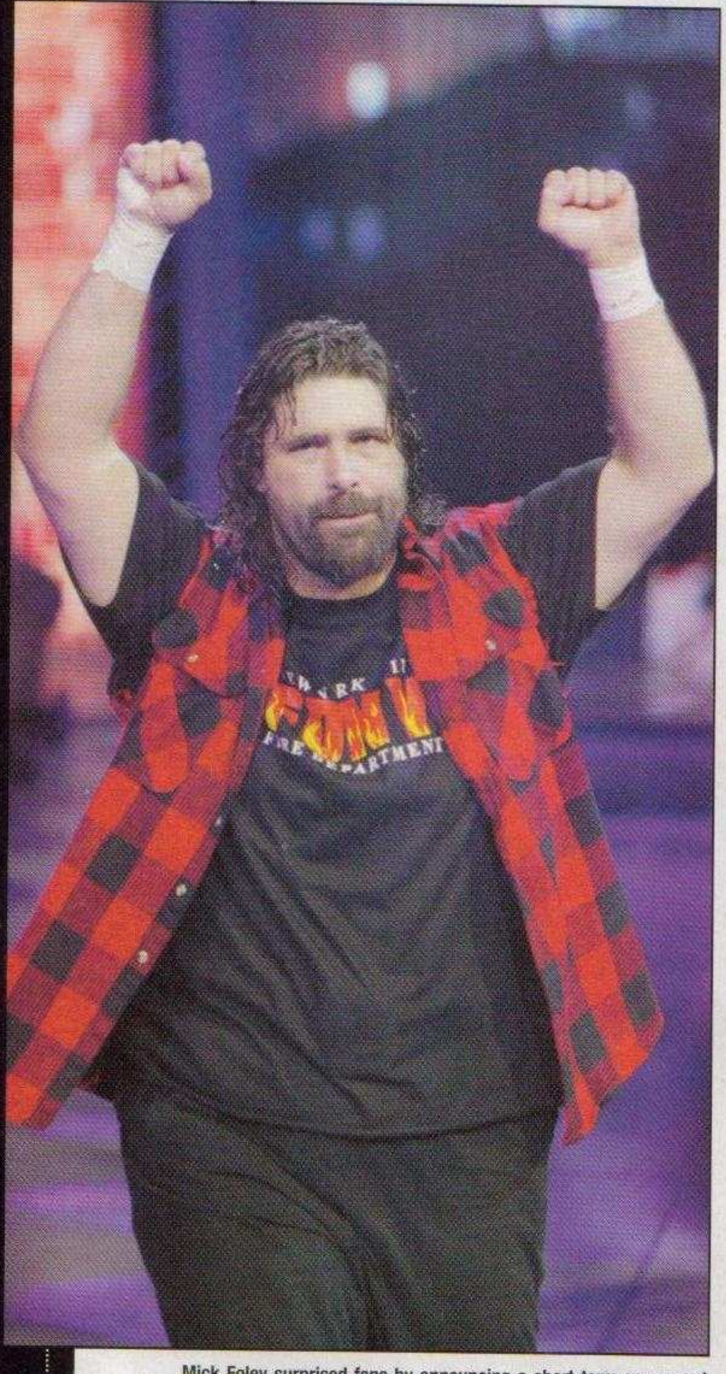
After his retirement, Kowalski went on to train a number of wrestling's top stars at his school in Malden, Massachusetts. **Triple-H**, **Chyna**, **Perry Saturn**, **John Kronus**, **Kenny Dykstra** (**Ken Doane**), and **Frank "Kaz" Kazarian** can all say they were taught by one of the most recognizable and effective villains in professional wrestling history.

Kowalski's contributions to professional wrestling—both directly and through the careers of those he shaped—cannot be minimized. Rest in peace, Killer.

Down in Orlando, TNA fans were surprised to learn of **Gail Kim**'s departure. Word is Gail was wooed away by the prospect of a bigger paycheck in WWE. As of press time,

Former TNA women's champion Gail Kim is expected to be making her WWE return. Kim's beauty and athleticism were integral in building the Knockouts division during her TNA tenure.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



Mick Foley surprised fans by announcing a short-term agreement with TNA. In his on-air debut, Foley has aligned himself with Jeff Jarrett against Kurt Angle and Sting.

Gail hadn't appeared in WWE. Whatever Kim's official reason for leaving, however, the decision has been unpopular among TNA fans.

There will be plenty of reasons for the TNA faithful to miss this athletic beauty. When she first arrived in Orlando, she honed her managerial skills by guiding the careers of **Jeff Jarrett** and **America's Most Wanted**. But, over time, Kim became a focal point of women's wrestling in TNA. Her battles with **Amazing Kong**, **Jacqueline Moore**, **Angelina Love**, and **Velvet Sky** will long be remembered as highlights of the still-young Knockouts division. Kim also added another title to her resume in 2007 when she was crowned the first TNA Knockouts champion.

Wherever her future travels take her, we certainly wish Gail Kim nothing but continued success. Hopefully for TNA fans, the addition of **Mick Foley** to the roster will reduce the sting of Gail's absence.

At press time, it was still unclear what role Foley will have in the organization, but he has done just about everything there is to do in this business—competitor, commissioner, GM, announcer, and ambas-

Then-WWE World champ took time to acknowledge the ringside presence of his former boss, Ring of Honor president Carey Silkin.

sador. It is not likely he'll do much actual wrestling, but he is a very original thinker who, given the opportunity, will doubtlessly add depth to the TNA storylines.

Foley's WWE exit came rather suddenly, considering he had just begun a program with Edge prior to SummerSlam. Edge's brutal attack on Foley promised another classic, bloody feud, but fans were shocked to find ECW announcer **Tazz** sitting in as Mick's replacement on Smackdown the very next week. Apparently, Foley will have to wait until some time in the future to get revenge on the "Rated R Superstar."

Upon signing what was described as a short-term deal with TNA, Foley said he was excited to have more time to work on his writing as well as movie and television appearances. The three-time former-WWE heavyweight champion said he harbored no bad feelings for WWE and thanked the company for all it had done for his career.

Meanwhile, wrestling fans have to be concerned about the prospect of **Shawn Michaels'** wrestling career nearing a close. With mounting injuries in recent years to his back, knees, eye, and now a torn triceps muscle (suffered during a Raw altercation with **Chris Jericho** prior to Unforgiven), several WWE insiders are speculating that Michaels may be close to the end.

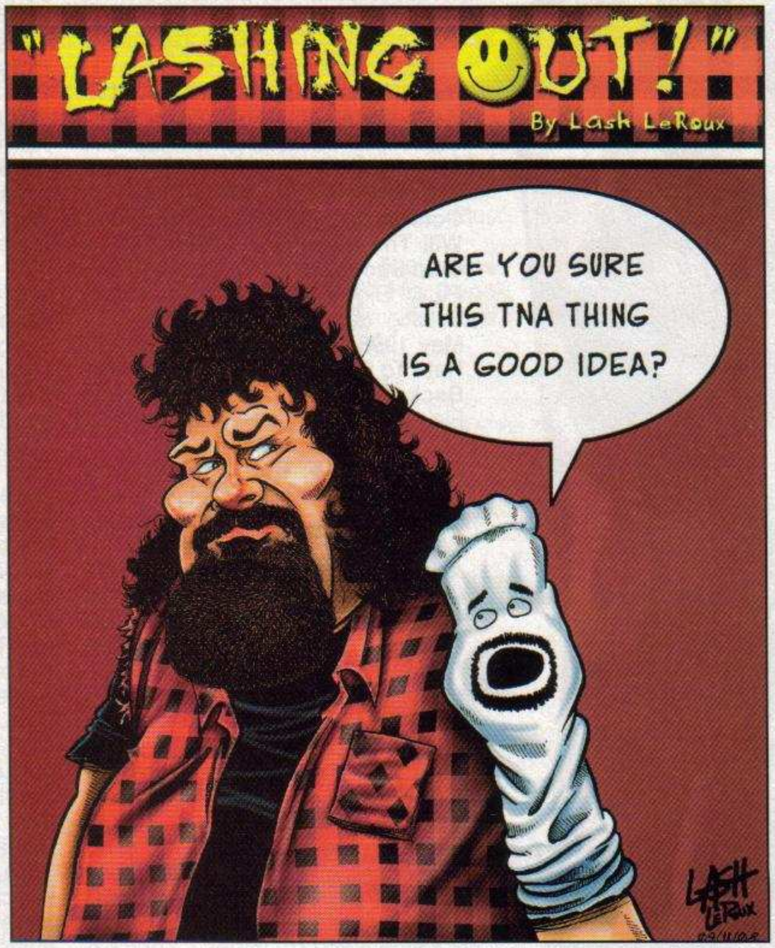
Michaels' reluctance to jump back into the game with both feet after each new injury has been hard to ignore. Many wondered if he would even return from the long-needed knee surgery he underwent last year. Michaels works a limited wrestling schedule as it is, shying away from most house shows and non-televised appearances. And there's no question that spending time with his wife, Rebecca, and his young children in San Antonio is becoming a priority for him. While Shawn hasn't officially called it quits, fans may want to savor HBK's matches as if they were among his last.

Ring of Honor has at least one alum who credits the company with helping make him into what he is today. That must have been why former WWE World champion **C.M. Punk** was so excited to find himself face-to-face with Ring of Honor President **Cary Silkin** at a recent Raw show in New York City.

In part a tribute to the promotion that helped launch his career, Punk took time to embrace his former boss and—after a steel cage match against **John Bradshaw Layfield**—acknowledged his friend's presence before the sold-out Madison Square Garden crowd.

On a much more somber note, we at The Wrestler were saddened to learn of several deaths in the wrestling community. Among them, 73-year-old **Ron Hill**, a self-trained wrestler and promoter who penned *When Professional Wrestlers Had Cauliflower Ears*, a book many claim was the first behind-the-scenes look at the lives of professional wrestlers.

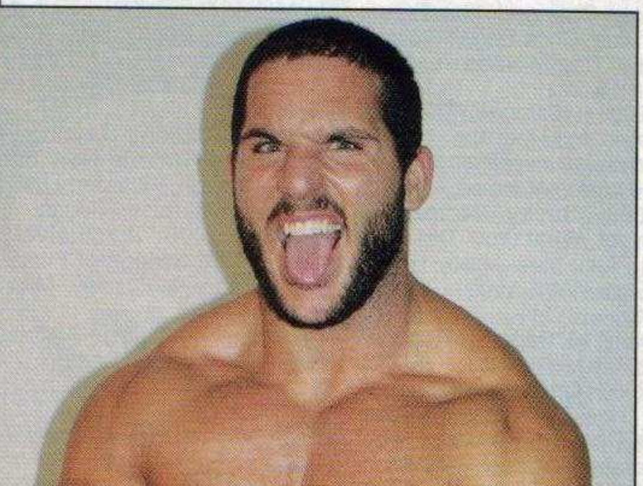
Also passing were **Sonny Fargo** (**Jack Louis Faggart**), a former referee and wrestler who is also the legitimate brother of Tennessee legend **Jackie Fargo**, former NWA light heavyweight champion **Alfonso Dantes** (**Jose Luis Amezcua Diaz**), **Joe Lesperance**, a former referee for **Stu Hart's** Stampede Wrestling promotion, and Canadian wrestler **Albert Olsen**, the self-proclaimed "Fighting Fireman," who also served part-time as a fire fighter in his native Winnipeg. All will be sorely missed. □


"LASHING OUT!"
By Lash LeRoux
ARE YOU SURE THIS TNA THING IS A GOOD IDEA?
LASH LeROUX

KREW-CUTS

BY FRANK KREWDA

I'D MUCH RATHER spend my Saturday afternoons pulling bass out of some local waterway than sitting around watching a "Spaghetti Western" marathon on AMC. But thanks to the effects of Tropical Storm Hannah, I was forced recently to sit through hours of Clint Eastwood squinting at a who's who of Italian B-list actors. All in all, though, it could have been worse. I did come away with an idea for this column …



When it comes to all-out effort and intensity in the ring, few wrestlers bring it like Ring of Honor's Erick Stevens. Some fans might consider Stevens a dark horse to beat current champ Nigel McGuinness, but Editor-In-Chief Frank Krewda feels Stevens is exactly the type of challenger who could unseat him.

THE GOOD. As odd as it might seem, the William Regal vs. Jamie Noble feud might just be the best in wrestling right now. It contains what many consider to be the three most integral elements of a successful program: Both men are working a stiff, mat-based style, both men have excellent promo skills, and Layla El provides all the sex appeal a (male) viewer could ask for … And it's about time WWE made use of Regal's legit training as a shooter. The gritty hooker character is much more interesting than the foppish executive persona, mainly because it lends itself to much more entertaining and believable matches … Pound-for-pound, though, I can't think of any wrestler who is more intense and believable than Ring of Honor's Erick Stevens. Every move Stevens makes in the ring seems to be executed with a purpose. Even though Bryan Danielson is a worthy number-one contender, Stevens would stand an excellent chance of ripping the heavyweight title from Nigel McGuinness' clutches. McGuinness is making noises about going after the tag team title, which sounds to me like he's bored with the level of competition for the big strap. Stevens is exactly the type of wrestler who could make McGuinness pay for a momentary lack of focus … Gotta love how TNA refuses to bend to political correctness. By promoting Sheik Abdul Bashir (Daivari) as a classic Arab heel, TNA is staying true to the age-old wrestling formula of good vs. evil, USA vs. the foreign menace, and heroes vs. villains. It must be Jim Cornette's influence. In today's lily-livered climate—where everyone goes out of his or her way to avoid offending others—the company that sticks with what works gets noticed.

THE BAD. Wonder if Mike Adamle gets nervous whenever he sees a termite. There is nobody in all of wrestling who is more wooden than the Raw GM. Well, maybe Jerry Lawler is whenever Kelly Kelly comes to the ring … C.M. Punk's WWE World title reign has become a real head-scratcher for me. What was the point? Punk never looked weaker than when he held the strap. Plus, it seems fairly obvious WWE had no plans for Punk after it took the title off him at Unforgiven. Sure, he got the obligatory rematch the next night on Raw. But he came up short, and then found himself embroiled in a feud with Cody Rhodes of all people. A few years ago, I wrote a feature story asking if WWE was giving Punk the RVD treatment—in other words, wasting his talents. Guess we finally got our answer ... As word spread throughout the New Alhambra Arena at Ring of Honor's Glory by Honor 7 pay-per-view taping on September 20 that ROH would be running all its Philly shows there, and not at the National Guard Armory, the ROH diehards seemed justifiably displeased. While there's something to be said for venue intimacy in the tradition of the original ECW, there's also something to be said for viable sight lines. With the bleacher seats removed, general admission seats become virtually useless—unless you're into studying the back of people's heads. Please, ROH, bring back the bleachers or return to the Armory ... Here's the type of thing that causes fans to take TNA less seriously than they otherwise might: Booker T's African accent. In the smart mark era, is there really any fan that is not familiar with Booker's body of work as G.I. Bro, one-half of Harlem Heat, or King Booker? Is there anyone who doesn't know that Booker is from Houston, Texas, and not Khartoum, Uganda? Why, then, should anyone buy into a character that is based on Forrest Whittaker's portrayal of Ugandan leader Idi Amin in the movie *The Last King Of Scotland*?

THE UGLY. I believe wrestling fans would agree that The Great Khali is a rather unattractive person. Opinion may be split on Vladimir Kozlov, though. Still, a Khali vs. Kozlov feud on Smackdown, which is reported to be in the works, has the potential to set new records in wrestling ugliness. Khali's limitations in the ring are apparent, if not well documented, and Kozlov, although more athletic than Khali, is in no position to "carry" him to a series of good matches. All in all, this showdown is as appealing as a triple-shot of cod liver oil. The only way to make it even remotely palatable is to have the behemoths face off in a shoot fight ... Has anybody else noticed a dramatic change in Candice Michelle since returning from her broken clavicle? Maybe she rehabbed too hard ... or not hard enough, maybe shorter hair doesn't flatter her, maybe she got her implants removed. Whatever it is, Candice just doesn't look as good as she did before she went down with the injury. And that's just her appearance. Her wrestling skills have also deteriorated during her layoff. In one recent match against Jillian Hall, Candice was supposed to make an impression on women's champ Beth Phoenix, who took in the match at ringside. But after all the missed moves and sloppy exchanges on the mat, the only impression Phoenix must've gotten was that Candice was no threat to her title. ☐

Photo by George Napolitano

While it's impossible for Krewda to say that Candice Michelle is "ugly," he feels the Diva hasn't looked or wrestled quite as well as she did before she went down with a broken clavicle .

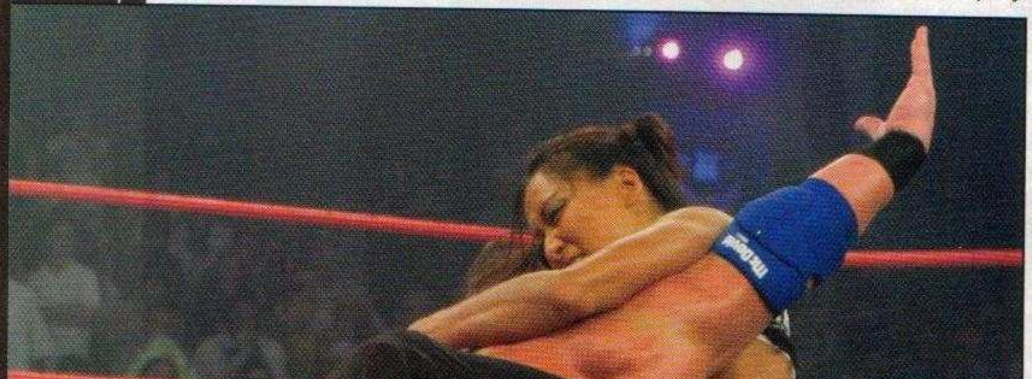
ON ASSIGNMENT

I TAKE A few weeks off and Dan Murphy uses my "On Assignment" column to start a feud with Bret Hart. Then, the most surprising promotional jump since the Monday Night Wars takes place as Gail Kim leaves TNA for WWE.

This is why I hate taking vacations ... I always seem to be off somewhere else when the good stuff happens.

One quick thought on Dan's column last month. Hart's conduct at the Tragos/Thesz Hall of Fame was despicable and the Turnbuckle Turkey he receives elsewhere in this issue is well-deserved. I'm glad Dan took Hart to task for his conduct. I just wish he hadn't used my column as the launching pad while I was away, leaving me with a stack of letters and e-mails weighing in on the matter.

On to Kim, the woman who became the cornerstone of the TNA Knockouts division and helped the women's division surpass the X division as the most exciting group in the company.



Gail Kim's move to WWE could benefit her pocketbook, but not necessarily her career. As Senior Writer Liz Hunter points out, Kim is an amazing wrestler, not just eye candy. In TNA, she even matched her talents against top male athletes, such as A.J. Styles.

According to people close to the situation, Kim's decision to leave TNA came down to dollars and cents. Her contract with TNA was set to expire, and the company was neither willing nor—most likely—able to match the offer WWE set on the table.

If that's the case, I can't blame Kim for taking the better offer. After all, pro athletes in mainstream sports routinely follow the dollars and go to the team willing to pay them the most.

But unlike athletes in mainstream sports, pro wrestlers are considered to be independent contractors, meaning they have to pay for their own insurance and expenses. One unfortunate fall and a wrestler's career can come to an end. When that happens, he or she is left without a source of income or a player's union for representation.

Kim wrestles a very athletic, daredevil style. She is in terrific shape, but her style puts her at a disproportionately high risk for injury. It makes good business sense for her to sign with the company willing to pay her the most, and WWE is a higher-profile company where she can earn

BY LIZ HUNTER

even more money in merchandise and endorsements.

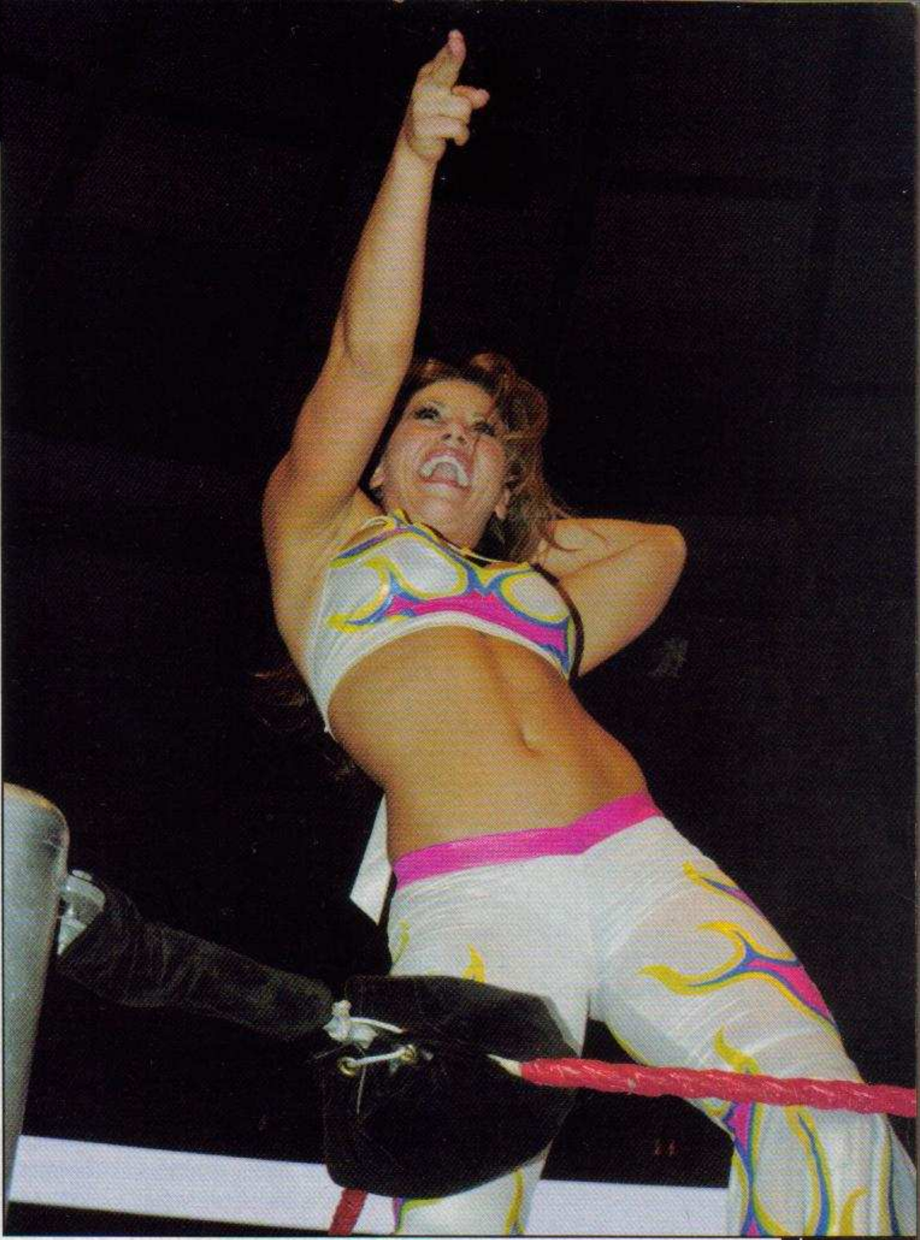
All that being said, I'm still not convinced that leaving TNA for WWE is a good move for Kim.

For my money, Kim is the best all-around female wrestler in the sport today. She may not have the raw power of a Beth Phoenix or Awesome Kong, but she's an excellent technician and is skilled in a variety of different international styles. She's the most exciting and dynamic woman wrestler of the post-Trish era, and her defection could prove to be a major blow to TNA.

But does WWE know to handle a woman of her talent?

WWE has no interest in presenting "women's wrestling." It would rather showcase Divas, interchangeable models who can learn a handful of moves and look good wearing skimpy little outfits. WWE sees its Divas as dime-a-dozen bimbos, girls willing to pose for *Playboy* and do sexy photos shoots to sell some magazines and posters.

In fairness, it must be noted that Kim isn't exactly afraid to show off her body to get ahead. She's posed topless for some cell phone advertisements in Korea that are now all over the Internet. And she's not being coy when she does that little fanny shake while climbing into the ring.


If WWE plans to market Kim as the wrestler she has trained so hard to become, they'll have to find her better competition. Mickie James matches up well against Kim, but a contest between two fan favorites on Raw is unlikely.

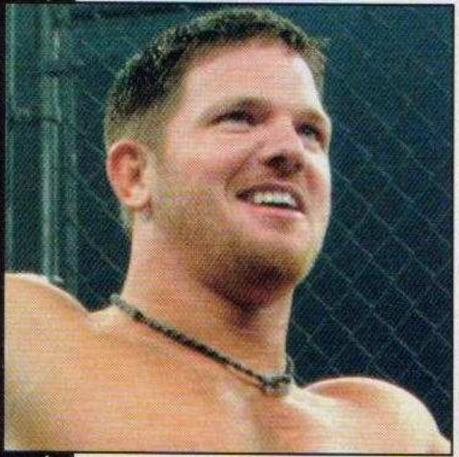
But beneath the booty-shaking sexiness, Kim is a legitimate wrestler. She trains four hours a day. She breaks down videotape and spars with a variety of training partners. She works hard to be the best wrestler she can be, not merely the best eye candy. That part seems to come naturally to Kim and she shouldn't be criticized for it.

Kim is a beautiful woman, but she's not the blonde-haired, blue-eyed, big-chested prototype WWE fans have been conditioned to accept. In TNA, Kim stood out as a gorgeous woman. In WWE, I'm afraid she'll be pushed off into the background, lost amidst the panoply of blonde hair, blue eyes, and implants.

My other concern is that there aren't many women in WWE capable of having a competitive match with Kim. Phoenix could be a good opponent, but her style is methodical and power-based, which will limit Kim's ability to showcase her quickness and fluid counter-wrestling abilities. Maria, Candice Michelle, and Michelle McCool can't hold a candle to Kim. Mickie James probably matches up best against Kim from a style standpoint, but Kim will only face her if (A) she debuts on the Raw brand and (B) she becomes a heel. If Kim shows up on Smackdown, she will be badly underutilized unless she faces Victoria or Natalya most nights.

I'm glad Kim is getting another chance with WWE, and I'm glad she presumably got the big-money contract she sought. I just hope she doesn't regret her decision six months from now when she's stuck battling Diva Search runner-ups for TV time. If she's doing bra-and-panties matches against the Bella Twins, the jump will be a travesty.

THUMBS UP



Thumbs Up to A.J. Styles. In a drastic turnaround from this point last year, Styles has once again become a preeminent fan favorite in TNA, and not a moment too soon. With a confusing scenario playing out in the TNA World championship chase at the end of the summer and Kurt Angle desperately grasping to whatever amount of power he still believed he had, Styles toed the line between good and evil ... and ended up doing the right thing far more often than not. Although his motives may not be entirely altruistic, the fans seem to like having Styles fight for them, rather than against them.

Thumbs Up to Ricky Ortiz. Another impressive new face working his way through the ECW roster, the man known as "The Latin Assassin" turned heads in WWE and throughout the industry. A former member of the short-lived XFL, Ortiz has developed into a solid wrestler with plenty of upside. Boasting a modest undefeated streak to start his WWE career, Ortiz brought the perfect combination of self-assuredness and raw talent to the ECW roster. Plus, with a hairstyle that puts a guy like Carlito to shame, fans immediately were drawn to Ortiz' charisma.

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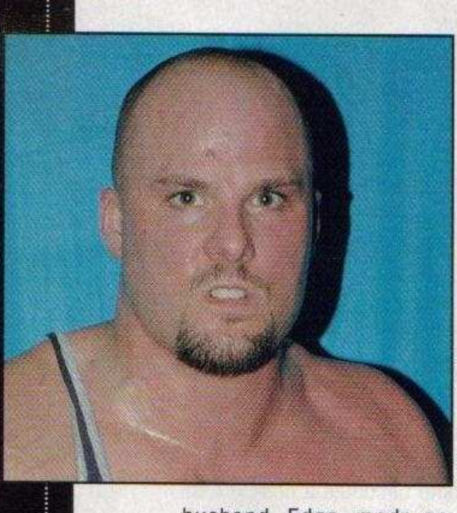

Photo by Joe Zanolle

Thumbs Up to Adam Pearce. Say what you want about Pearce's shady tactics, or his association with Sweet and Sour Inc., or his uncontrollable narcissism. The fact is Pearce cleanly defeated one of Ring of Honor's best pure wrestlers in Brent Albright on September 20 in Philadelphia. Even more impressively, "Scrap Iron" beat Albright at his own game, forcing the NWA heavyweight champ to submit to an armbar and relinquish the title. Perhaps the only person more shocked than Albright—or the fans at the New Alhambra Arena—that night was Pearce himself.

Thumbs Up to Vickie Guerrero. Guerrero, in an effort to get back at her philandering husband, Edge, made an astounding reversal of her prior stance. Her first order of business, shockingly, was to reinstate Edge's mortal enemy, The Undertaker, from a forced exile and put both men in what would prove to be a brutal "Hell In A Cell" match at SummerSlam. Regardless of whether Guerrero saw the error of her ways or, simply, just loves revenge, it was nice to see her make the right decision for a change.

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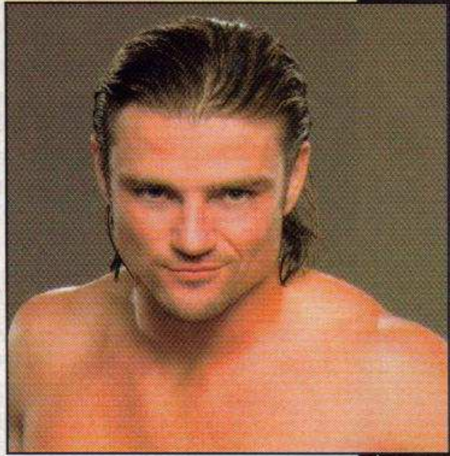
THUMBS DOWN

Thumbs Down to Chris Jericho. It's one thing to focus on ending the legendary career of Shawn Michaels, but it's something completely different—and far more despicable—to injure the man's wife in the process. Yet, that's exactly what Jericho did to Michaels' wife, Rebecca, during the "Heartbreak Kid's" purported retirement announcement at SummerSlam. While Jericho's punch, which landed squarely in the face of Rebecca, was shocking enough, it was Y2J's stunning lack of remorse the following night on Raw that earned him this distinction. In a particularly classless move, Jericho blamed Rebecca's fate on her husband.



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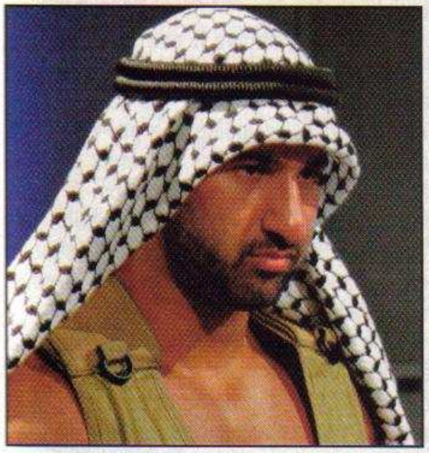
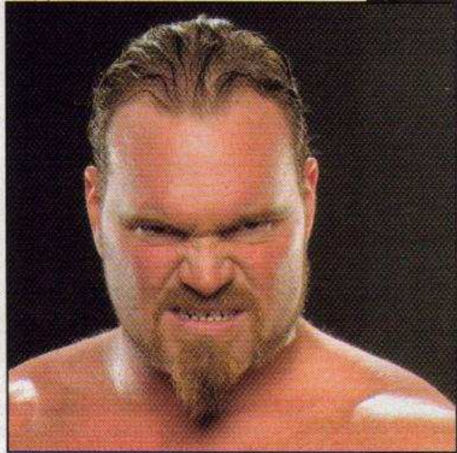
Thumbs Down to Brian Kendrick. Nearly as confusing as the shin-high short-pants and opera mask combination, the emergence of the entity known as "The Brian Kendrick" has fans of the former WWE World tag team champion scratching their heads. While it's always encouraging to see wrestlers cut their own path and move in a new direction, the odd way with which Kendrick now takes himself seriously is disconcerting. Complete with his own bodyguard, Kendrick's ego has grown to massive proportions since debuting as a member of the Smackdown brand following the mid-summer draft. The fans of his talent should remain, but it's hard to not be put off by Kendrick's amazing amount of self-love.



Thumbs Down to Sheik Abdul Bashir. Every time Sheik makes a move in his career, it seems as if he has the opportunity to change his ways, embrace the fans that want to see him succeed, and allow his ability to make its mark. Yet, once again—now as a member of the TNA roster—Bashir is back to his trusted ways of skirting the rules, dismissing the fans, and generally grasping for a shortcut to success. Aligning himself with the likes of Petey Williams and spewing even more anti-American sentiment than ever before, Bashir made it clear from Day One that he was in it for himself and no one was safe from his hateful rhetoric or sneak-attacks.



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Thumbs Down to Mike Knox. You know you've reached a new low when your attempt at goading a competitor into a battle is through driving a wedge between that wrestler and his family. Mike Knox's attempt to separate the Finlays by putting the thought in the father's head that his son, Hornswoggle, was holding him back is certainly the lowest tactic he's employed since entering ECW in 2006. And we're talking about the guy who disrupted Kelly Kelly's Extreme Exposé on a weekly basis! Now, that's pretty low. □

POINT:

A TV-PG RATING IS WWE'S BEST CHANCE FOR GROWTH

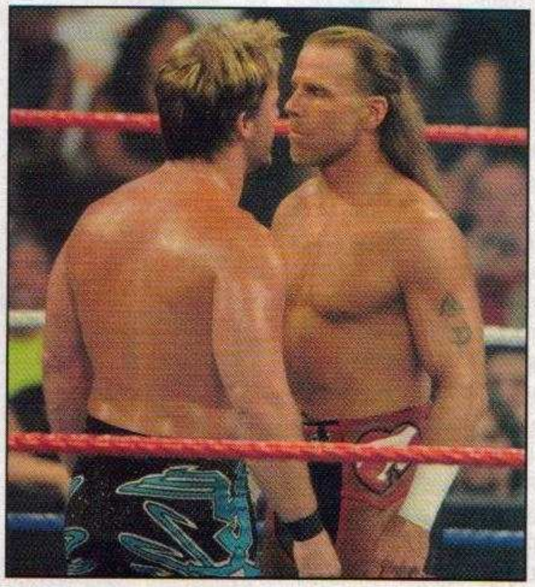
BY MICHAEL MOORE

THREE LETTERS BEST justify Vince McMahon's decision to make his product more family-friendly: UFC.

Mixed martial arts promotions today are what WWF, WCW, and professional wrestling in general were 10 years ago. The same crowd that identified with "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin's anti-authoritarianism a decade ago is now more interested in seeing if an opponent can make it past the second round with Anderson Silva.

The testosterone-driven 18- to 35-year-old male demographic craves blood and violence, and these days they're going to find more of the real thing inside an octagon, not an Elimination Chamber.

WWE has a very loyal wrestling fan base, however, which is proven by Raw's weekly 3.0-plus TV rating. But McMahon craves more. He wants to convince casual viewers that WWE is more than a wrestling troupe ... and he just might do it, thanks to the new rating.



The feud between Shawn Michaels and Chris Jericho has featured injuries and blood, but Contributing Writer Michael Moore says that, on balance, solid, competitive wrestling has carried the feud. As WWE moves to a TV-PG rating, Moore feels de-emphasizing crass content will serve WWE well.

During the peak of the Monday Night Wars, Raw alone was popping ratings above 6.0. Add *WCW Monday Nitro's* gaudy numbers and professional wrestling was approaching a 12.0 rating on a weekly basis. That means at one point, approximately four times as many fans were watching wrestling on Monday nights then than are watching now.

Where did the fans go? More importantly, how can wrestling get them back? Late-1990s type of success may not be a reality today, but there are far more *potential* wrestling fans out there. Sure, McMahon isn't going to keep them away from UFC, but he can prove to the parents of young fans that Raw, Smackdown, and live WWE events are fun for the whole family.

Here's why he can and will do it. The PG rating forces WWE's creative team to be more, well, creative. They won't be able to fall back on shock tactics like HLA or Edge and Lita's live sex shows. They're going to have to find a way to attract viewers without resorting to Springer-esque tactics.

Recent programming shows it can be done. For example: The Shawn Michaels vs. Chris Jericho feud has been a highlight of WWE over the past several months. Why? Because, excluding one pay-per-view, there haven't been any bloodbaths, attempts at toilet humor, or half-naked women to distract from it. True, the feud has included Jericho slamming Michaels through a TV screen and decking his wife, but those were the only deviations from what has been a rather conservative program.

WWE's switch to a PG-rated product won't be a smooth one, and it won't happen overnight. Fans that were turned off by Mae Young giving birth to a hand or Vince McMahon's "fatal" limousine explosion last year may be difficult to win back.

But WWE's best chance to succeed is to finally move away from the Attitude Era and toward a more traditional, family-friendly product again. Today's core demographic may be inclined toward MMA, but there are plenty of other fans waiting to be seduced.

Michael Moore is a contributing writer for The Wrestler.

[COUNTERPOINT:]

PRO WRESTLING IS NOT A TV-PG SPORT

BY BRADY HICKS

THE LAST TIME Vince McMahon was selling a PG product, wrestling fans were subjected to Doink the Clown, T.L. Hopper, and The Goon. Do we really want to return to those days?

Wrestling, by its very nature, is not a PG-rated sport. In fact, wrestling is at its best when two competitors are entangled in a bitter, violent feud. The idea of two grown men like Chris Jericho and Shawn Michaels trying to settle their dispute on a family-friendly show just doesn't work. Imagine how flat this feud would have been if Raw viewers were unable to see the gruesome eye injury Y2J inflicted on Michaels at The Great American Bash.

Pro wrestling had its PG period in the 1980s. In the midst of the Cold War, fans wanted an all-American hero to stand up to the bad guys. For a generation that grew up on Luke Skywalker, He-Man, and G.I. Joe, a flesh and blood superhero was the order of the day.

But times have changed. Society is different from what it was when Hulkamania was born. Wrestling fans just won't accept a goody two-shoes that tells them to train, say their prayers, and take their vitamins.

Besides that, wrestling fans are much more in tune with real life. They realize that nobody is as squeaky clean as Hulk Hogan and the Von Erichs pretended to be.

That isn't to say the extreme violence and smut—edgy content, some might call it—that infiltrated our great sport should be the norm. But we should never forget that the excesses of the Attitude Era generated some much-needed fan interest at a critical time.

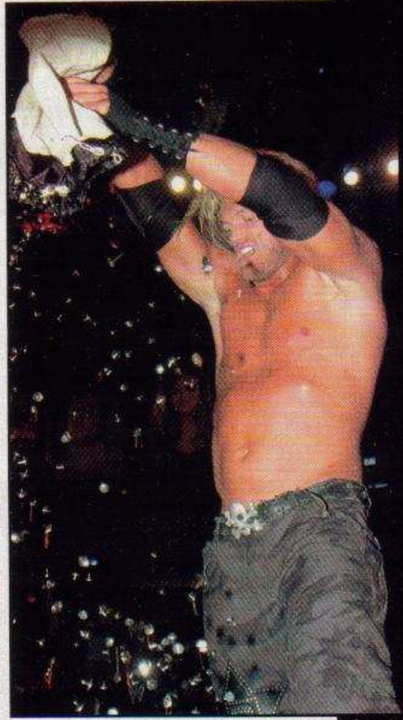
Putting the T&A aside, professional wrestling is still a fundamentally violent sport, and the TV-14 rating WWE abandoned was much more appropriate for shows like Raw and Smackdown. The designation allowed the sport to be itself for better or worse, and freed WWE from the shackles of the network suits.

Asking the NFL or professional boxing to tone down their style of play would be ludicrous. So why then, would McMahon want to change WWE's formula for success—a formula that has succeeded with sex and violence as its driving forces.

Lingerie matches, for example, may not evoke memories of Gotch vs. Hackenschmidt, but let's face it: Few viewers change the channel when the Divas start shedding their clothes. Nor do you hear the fans in attendance booing when these matches take place.

In deviating from the proven formula, McMahon runs the risk of sabotaging his own product. As all wrestling fans know, his idea of PG is much different from that of most parents and TV execs.

By switching the rating, McMahon is telling parents it's okay to sit down with their kids for one of his shows, yet in the first few weeks after the switch to PG, Raw alone included Jerry Lawler talking about how far Katie Lea will go on the first date, old clips of Chris Jericho mocking Stephanie McMahon's breast implants, and Kane and Batista attempting to bash each other's skulls in with a steel chair.



Thanks to WWE's new TV-PG rating, the "Rated R Superstar" may be forced to tone down his act. Contributing Writer Brady Hicks says that abandoning the edgy material that has kept WWE relevant for so many years will make the task all the harder.

It should also be noted that McMahon is drawn to controversy. It's only a matter of time before the next incest, necrophilia, or attempted murder angle is played out. If McMahon leads parents to believe his product is appropriate for families, and presents something that isn't, he runs the risk of losing many more fans than he will attract.

WWE is trying to save a ship that isn't sinking. By lowering its rating, WWE hopes to lure fans under false pretenses—something that, in the end, is only going to hurt the business as a whole. It's time for McMahon to embrace what he's known all along: Professional wrestling just isn't a PG-rated sport.

Brady Hicks is a contributing writer for The Wrestler. ☐

INTRODUCING

DAKOTA DARSOW

AT 21 YEARS old, Dakota Darsow has already had the kind of life any wrestling fan would envy. Growing up, the son of Barry "Smash" Darsow saw the wrestling industry as an extended family rather than a business.

Long before he understood fame, glory, or even getting a paycheck, he saw the locker room as a place to hang out and have fun. As a boy, he often accompanied his father on the road, giving him an inside look at the business.

While some fans dreamed of meeting Andre the Giant in the '80s, Darsow recalled how Andre would babysit him while his dad faced opponents in the ring. "Andre would watch me for a little while. His smile was just huge, and he could hold me with one hand," Darsow said.

Andre the Giant wasn't the only legend Darsow knew. Rick Rude, Curt Hennig, and The Road Warriors were more than superstars he watched on television. They were his father's best friends. "They used to come over to our house. My dad grew up with all the Minnesota guys," Darsow said.

In 2007, Darsow debuted in Steel Domain Wrestling in South Dakota, where he faced one of his trainers, former WCW star Lenny Lane. "I was nervous," he said. "There was a huge crowd, close to 1,000 people were in the arena, but once I actually got through the curtain and out to the ring, the nervousness all went away."

More recently, Darsow took part in an eight-man tag team match for Wisconsin's Great Lakes Championship Wrestling that gave him the chance to wrestle alongside his father and wear the trademark Demolition makeup.

He described the event as more fun than work, but he knows that succeeding on the pro level requires more work than fun. If there's one thing The Repo Man taught his son about gaining success in the industry, it was to develop a solid work ethic.

Darsow has taken his father's advice to heart and hits the gym every day, watches what he eats, and runs through amateur wrestling drills. He wrestles every chance he gets and says that working with different opponents is a big plus. "The more I get in the ring, the more I learn," he said.

While some fans may assume that second-generation wrestlers have an easy time making a name for themselves, the younger Darsow subscribes to his father's belief that it really comes down to hard work. "I

WORKIN' STIFF

BY AL CASTLE

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

While many New Yorkers spent their summer catching the final baseball games ever to be played in Yankee and Shea Stadiums, I spent my weekends in July and August with my very own, "Boys Of Summer."

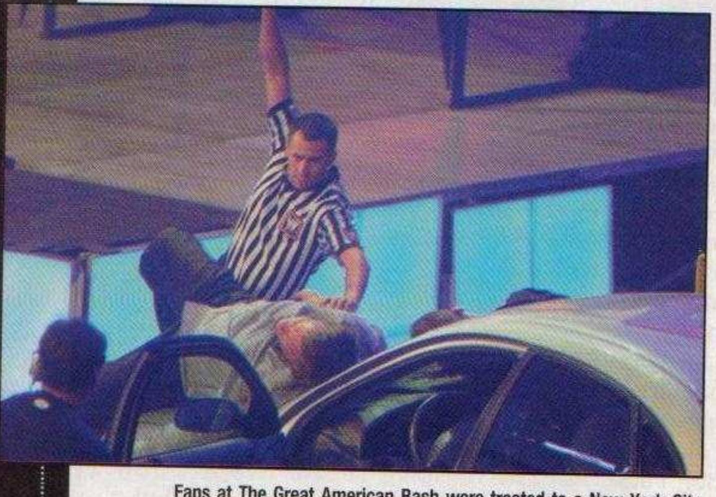
Indeed, it was an especially busy and exciting summer of 2008 for wrestling fans living in and around the Big Apple, one filled with high-production pay-per-views, small and intimate house shows, and—most encouragingly—true wrestling diversity. Fans of WWE, TNA, and ROH all had something to break the monotony of lazy Saturdays at the beach and Sundays grilling in the backyard.

Here's a sampling of my slamming summer:

July 20: WWE's Great American Bash at the Nassau Coliseum in Uniondale, New York

The Coliseum's history with WWE may not be as storied as Madison Square Garden's, but nevertheless, Long Island's home arena has seen its share of great cards. The first wrestling show I ever attended took place here in 1987, when Ricky Steamboat narrowly escaped a steel cage with his Intercontinental championship intact in a match with Randy Savage.

But despite Long Island's sizable wrestling fan contingent, WWE pay-per-views have been somewhat sparse in this building. Only 2002's SummerSlam and a third of WrestleMania II were held here. So it was no surprise that the typically rabid Long Island fans were doubly crazed for this pay-per-view event, which featured John Cena battling John Bradshaw Layfield in a New York City Parking Lot Brawl.



Fans at The Great American Bash were treated to a New York City Parking Lot Brawl between John Cena and JBL. Some fans later saw the brawl reprised in the parking lot between a WWE road hand and two would-be thieves who tried to steal a commemorative chair.

Some, in fact, may have been a little too excited about the event. After the final match wrapped up, a second, unscheduled parking lot brawl broke out—this one featuring two fans who allegedly tried to steal souvenir ringside chairs from the backstage area vs. the crewmember who stopped them. For his troubles, the roadie was bitten and had a bottle broken over his head, police said.

Thanks for visiting Long Island, WWE. Please come again soon.

July 27: WWE live event at the Westchester County Center in White Plains, New York

It was a far more docile crowd that filled the small Westchester County Center for this house show. The 4,000-seat building—a fixture for WWE shows and Monday Night Raw tapings during the company's lean years—was one of the few in which I had never seen a wrestling show.

I was less than enthusiastic about making the hour drive to White Plains in the rain to catch this relatively minor event, but in the end, I was glad I did. In doing so, I traveled not only to Westchester, but seemingly back in time.

There were no pyrotechnics. No massive TitanTron. No backstage drama given nearly as much time as the action in the ring.

Instead, there was a ring, a couple of lights, an entryway with a curtain, and some wrestlers. And that was plenty.

Watching young fans rush from their seats to the ringside rail after each three-count, hoping to slap hands with a superstar, I thought back to that first Nassau Coliseum house show I attended 21 years ago. And I realized that in some ways, not much has changed since then.

August 2: Ring of Honor at the Hammerstein Ballroom in New York, New York

Growing up in New York City, and without cable television, I had little opportunity as a child to watch Ric Flair defend his NWA heavyweight championship during his—and arguably, the NWA's—prime years.

So I never would have guessed that in 2008, I'd have the opportunity to witness a historic NWA heavyweight title change take place in my own hometown.

It happened at ROH's Glory by Honor event, where Brent Albright defeated Adam Pearce to capture the title in a rare NWA championship match not held on an NWA show. As surreal as it may have been to me as a fan, I can't imagine what it was like for Brent, who gave a star-making performance on this night and left the building with the same championship belt worn by the likes of Flair, Harley Race, and Jack Brisco.

You're in good company, Brent.

August 9: TNA's Hard Justice at the Sovereign Bank Arena in Trenton, New Jersey

While not exactly in the shadows of New York City, TNA's first pay-per-view offering to be held in the Tri-State area was worth making the drive.

It took some slight of hand to make the two-thirds empty arena appear respectably full on television, but TNA officials, performers, and fans should hold their heads up high for coming this far.

It was just a few years ago that TNA was running shows out of the tiny Nashville Fairgrounds rec center in front of a few hundred fans. Now, here they were running in a regular Northeast tour stop for WWE.

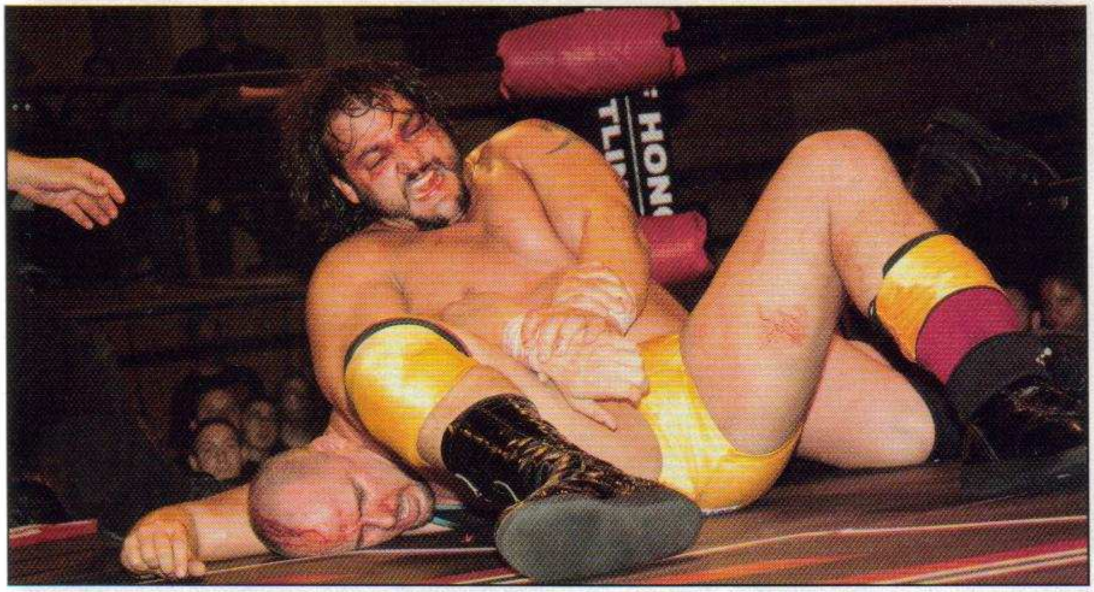
Anyway you slice it, that's progress.

August 23: WWE live event at Madison Square Garden in New York, New York

Before the days of monthly pay-per-views, regular MSG shows were traditionally where it all happened. But as WWE has transitioned into using "The World's Most Famous Arena" primarily for televised events, the Garden house show has become a thing of the past. More than three years since WWE last ran a non-televised event at Madison Square Garden, the Raw brand returned to the building, sans television cameras or elaborate stage settings.

In the main event, C.M. Punk defeated JBL in a cage match to retain the World championship. After the match, Punk stuck around to do snow angels mid-ring while staring up at the lights.

And who could blame him? I'm sure if you would have told Punk, who in 2005 competed for ROH in the far-smaller Manhattan Center just across the street, that three years later he would be defending a world title in a cage match main event of a WWE event in Madison Square Garden, he just might have suggested you go to sleep. ☐



Brent Albright and Adam Pearce fought in one of the best matches in ROH history … for the NWA heavyweight championship. For all the skill and power they exerted, it was a simple armbar from Albright that won him the title from Pearce.

SPOTLIGHT ON . . .

A.J. STYLES

December 1999: A.J Styles changes his name from Mr. Olympia and debuts in the new NWA Wildside, where he would go on to win three TV titles and a heavyweight championship.

BORN ALLAN JONES, A.J. Styles brought a wealth of amateur wrestling experience to the professional ranks in 1998 ... Member of the Anderson College wrestling team before turning pro ... Learned the pro game with Rick Michaels at the National Championship Wrestling Training School in Cornelia, Georgia, while part of NCW ... Debuted March 1999 as the masked Mr. Olympia ... Lost his first professional match to Michael Brooks ... Mr. Olympia quickly gained some success ... Won the NCW TV championship a mere five months into his career ... Promotion merged with NWA Wildside by the end of 1999 ... Mr. Olympia ditched the mask and changed his name to A.J. Styles ... Won the NWA Wildside TV title in January 2000, beating future fellow TNA member Ron Killings ... Held the title one more time before leaving NWA Wildside in 2001 ... Made the move to Atlanta-based World Championship Wrestling ... Followed to WCW by former NWA Wildside nemesis Air Paris ... Naturally, the duo was paired as a tag team ... Debuted together as Air Raid complete with flight suits ... Lost first match to the team of Disco Inferno and Alex Wright ... Competed in the short-lived WCW cruiserweight tag team division ... Didn't make it out of the first round in a tournament for the straps ... Continued to make occasional appearances for NWA Wildside ... Styles and Paris actually feuded with each other in the NWA while teaming in WCW ... Stayed on until WCW was bought out by WWF ... Returned to Wildside, again as a team, leaving the flight suits behind ... Enjoyed greater success in return trip to NWA Wildside ... Defeated Christopher Daniels at NWA 53rd Anniversary show ... Parlayed that visibility into an IPW heavyweight championship ... Finished up 2001 by winning the NWA Georgia heavyweight title from none other than his mentor, Rick Michaels ... Made forgettable appearances for WWF in early-2002 ... Lost to The Hurricane on WWF's *Jakked* program ... Turned down a WWF developmental deal because he didn't want to relocate away from his family ... Expanded his brand overseas ... Toured with World Wrestling All-Stars ... Briefly held the WWA International cruiserweight title after beating Nova in Melbourne, Australia ... Refocused on gaining success in the United States ... Signed a non-exclusive deal with upstart NWA-TNA in mid-2002 ... Maintained outside bookings while wrestling with NWA-TNA ... Competed initially, yet again, as a tag team specialist ... Paired with both Low-Ki and

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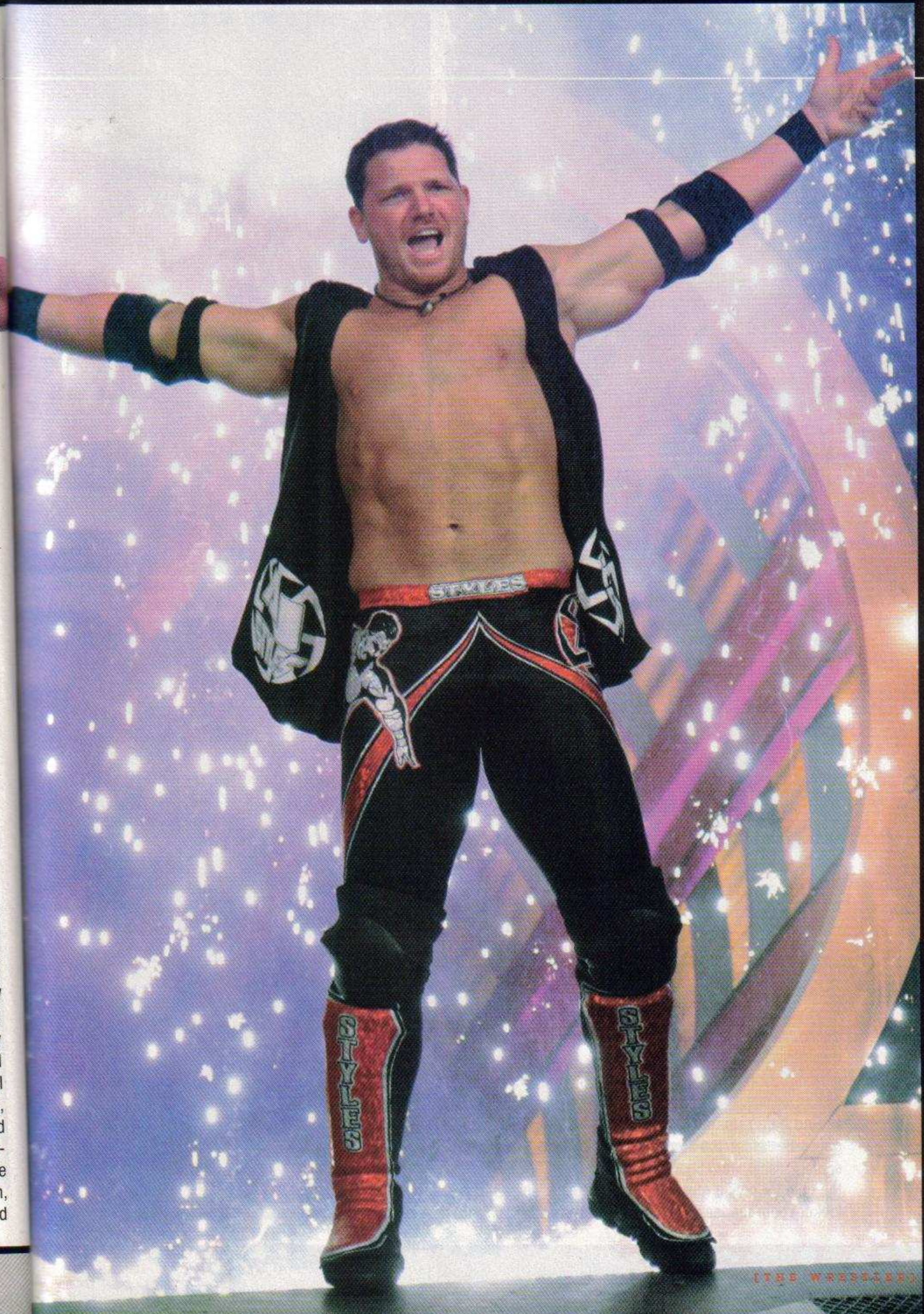
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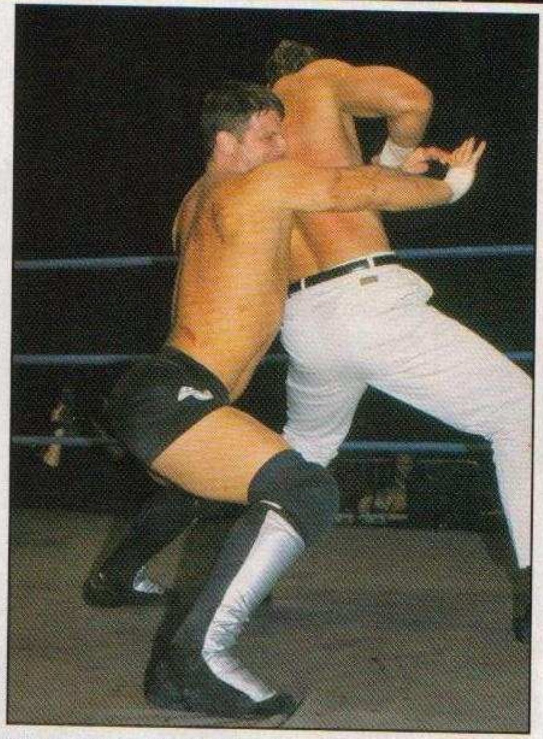
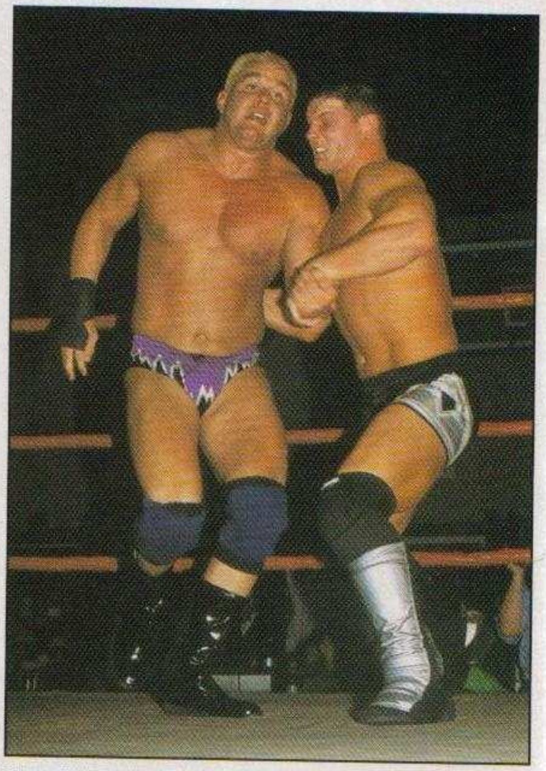
STYLES

March 2001: Air Raid—Styles and Air Paris—make *WCW Monday Nitro* debut. The team would be eliminated in the first round of the cruiserweight tag team championship tournament, but not before Styles executed a powerful suplex on Elix Skipper, one-half of the eventual winning team.

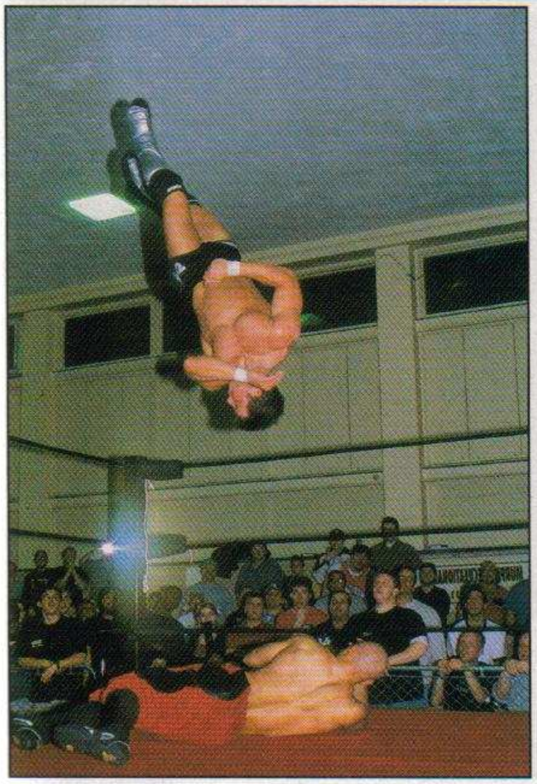
Jerry Lynn at different points ... Only took a week to make history ... Became first ever NWA-TNA X division champion in mid-2002 ... Defeated Psicosis, Low-Ki, and Lynn in a "Fatal Four-Way" match for the belt ... Would be the first of six title reigns ... Lost the gold to Low-Ki less than two months later ... Synonymous with the intensity and excitement the division was built upon ... Held the NWA tag team title with Lynn during the early days of TNA ... Partnership quickly fell apart as egos and losses grew bigger ... Appeared with Philadelphia-based Ring of Honor throughout early time with NWA-TNA ... Feuded with Low-Ki in ROH over the promotion's championship title ... Could not capture the gold ... Went on to win tag team championship gold nearly single-handedly, as partner Paul London was unexpectedly sidelined by injury ... Won a title shot by defeating three experienced teams ... Captured the gold with Amazing Red ... Defeated Christopher Daniels in the process ... Title was vacated soon thereafter due to Red being unable to compete ... Life in TNA was going better at the time ... Won second X division championship, from Sean Waltman, in late-2002 ... Held the gold for only a month ... Back in ROH, viewed as a locker room leader and bankable commodity ... Took



February 2002: After leaving WCW, which was sold to WWE, Styles makes his way around various independent promotions, including the AWA. Here he battles Tony Mamaluke as part of a six-way dance.



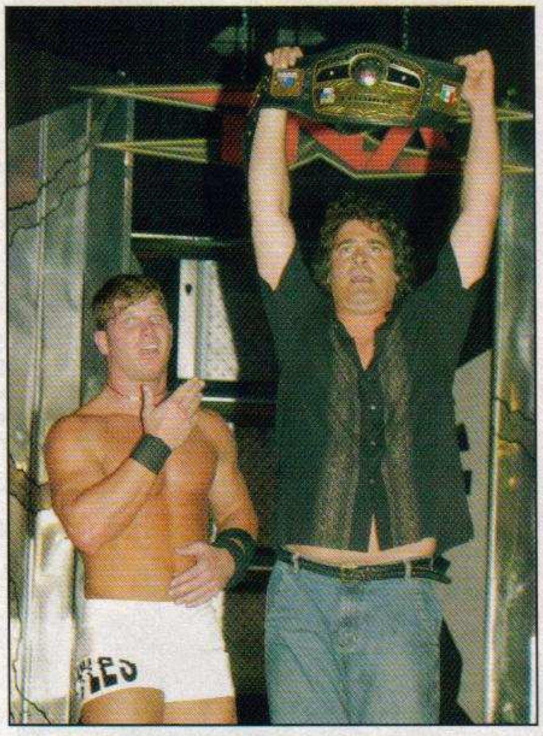
March 2002: Styles, now gaining more recognition on the indy circuit, is invited to the ECWA "Super 8" tournament. He makes it all the way to the finals before losing to Donovan Morgan.



April 2002: Styles debuts in Ring of Honor and faces off against AWA rival Low-Ki in what becomes an eventual ROH championship rematch. Styles eventually loses to Low-Ki, but becomes the first person to hold the number-one contenders trophy.

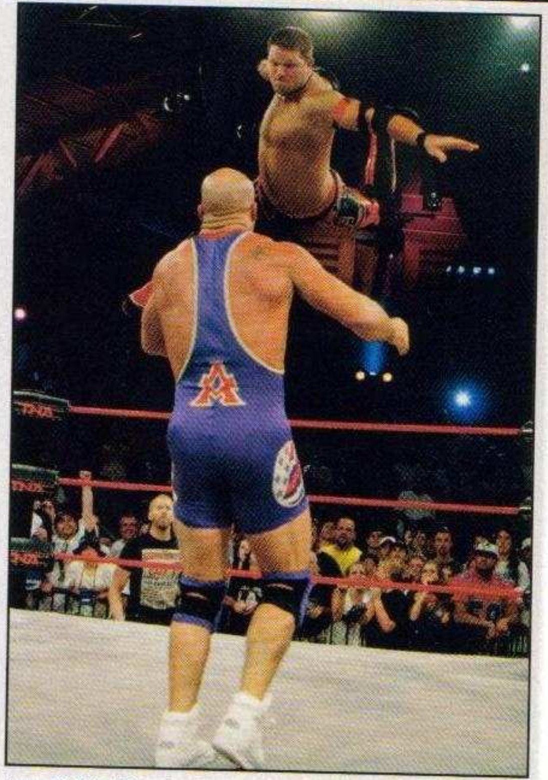
June 2002: A.J. becomes the first-ever TNA X division champion, defeating Low-Ki, Psicosis, and Jerry Lynn in a four-way match. This is the first of six title reigns for Styles.

on Jimmy Rave as protégé in 2003 ... Made history once again by becoming ROH's first ever Pure wrestling champion ... Was forced to vacate the championship under controversial circumstances ... TNA-contracted wrestlers were forbidden to wrestle for ROH, although this moratorium was short-lived ... Turned attention to the top prize in TNA—the NWA heavyweight championship ... Won the gold in a three-way match with Jeff Jarrett and Raven thanks to the interference of Vince Russo ... Hated by the fans for only a brief period of time ... Lost the gold, gained the love of the fans ... Teamed with Sting to face Jarrett and Lex Luger ... Preference for singles wrestling was apparent and the duo really didn't stick ... Won his second NWA tag team championship with Abyss ... Teammates feuded with each other over control of the championship ... "The Monster" won out ... Refocused attention on regaining the NWA heavyweight championship, which he did ... Second reign lasted far less than the first ... Returned to ROH for one night in 2005 to teach a lesson to former protégé Rave, who had seemingly lost his way ... Failed to do so in a hotly contested and controversial match ... Returned to ROH on a more regular basis once relations improved between the promotion and TNA ... Paired with Generation Next member Matt Sydal to take on The Embassy faction ... Attempted to capture the ROH

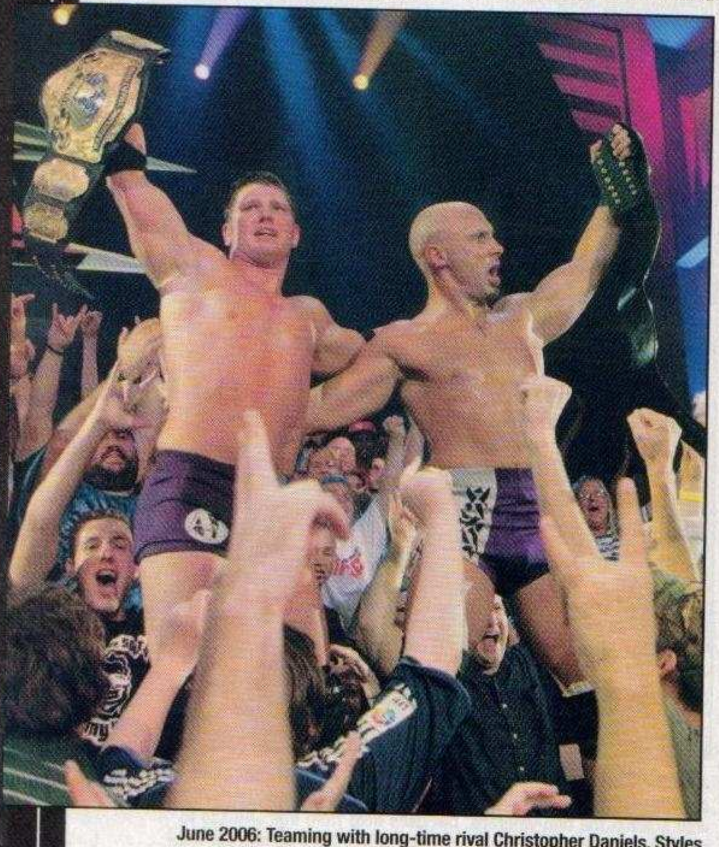


June 2003: Styles wins his first of three NWA heavyweight championships. Pitted against Jeff Jarrett and Raven, Styles performs well against the two veterans, but uses help from Vince Russo to lock up the title. This is the first time A.J. incurs boos from the crowd. Those boos would revert to cheers when Styles dumped Russo and lost the title.

title once again from Christopher Daniels ... Feud was short-lived in ROH, but seeds were sown for the future of TNA ... Failed to capture the gold ... Appearances with ROH began to decrease as popularity in TNA increased ... Rekindled feuds with Jarrett and Abyss during the early days of TNA's *Impact* television program ... Won the NWA heavyweight championship for a third, and final, time in 2005 ... Briefly returned to NWA Wildside during 2004 and 2005 ... Final appearance was a loss to David Young ... Critically hailed as a great match that far too few people were fortunate enough to see ... Remained one of the hottest commodities in TNA throughout ... Began a long feud with both Daniels and Samoa Joe over the X division title following NWA heavyweight championship loss ... The three fought in a Match of the Year candidate at TNA's Unbreakable pay-per-view ... Went on to briefly hold the NWA World tag team championship with longtime rival Daniels ... Toed the line, once again, between fan favorite and rulebreaker ... Turned to the dark side seemingly for good when he turned against apparent friend Rhino ... Played second-fiddle to Christian Cage in his "Christian Coalition" faction ... Relegated mostly to grunt work and embarrassing situations ... Tagged with Tomko as part of the coalition ... Team won the TNA World tag team championship ... Allegiances changed once again ... The team left Cage in the dust and joined forces with Kurt Angle's "Angle Alliance" group ... Convinced Cage to join them only to turn against him shortly thereafter ... Became Angle's whipping boy as part of the alliance ... Angle Alliance quickly fell into disarray when members' individual agendas became the focal point ... Focus shifted from success in the ring to a budding relationship with Angle's wife, Karen ... Denied any suggestion the relationship was more than plutonic ... Lack of focus led to loss of the TNA World tag title ... Missed out on "King Of The Mountain" qualifying victory due to interference by a very angry former partner, Tomko ... Battled Angle throughout 2008 ... Incurred the wrath of Angle sympathizers Team 3-D ... Maintained constant contact with Karen throughout the ordeal ... Defeated Angle at Slammiversary only to earn a beating by his opponent and Tomko for his efforts ... Set sights on taking the only thing from Angle he loved more than his wife ... Defeated Angle in a match on *Impact* in late-2008 for the former Olympian's gold medal ... Retained the medal in a vicious match with a strange finish ... Ended up defeating Angle on *Impact* after the lights went out in the arena ... Revealed to have had a guitar resembling one usually used by Jarrett. □



August 2008: After breaking away from the Angle Alliance, Styles and Kurt Angle begin a bitter feud. Their bouts would become Match of the Year candidates as A.J. beats Kurt to take his Olympic gold medal on TNA *Impact* after defeating him at Hard Justice.



June 2006: Teaming with long-time rival Christopher Daniels, Styles begins his third of four NWA tag team championship reigns. The duo beats out seven-time champions America's Most Wanted.

Q & A

MISSY HYATT

"If I didn't need money, I'd work in this business for free"

WHO WAS WRESTLING'S original diva? There are credible arguments to be made for Miss Elizabeth, Baby Doll, Sunshine, Tammy Sytch, Sable, or any number of pioneering women. But, there is one lady in particular who would make any short list: Missy Hyatt.

What has been the key to Hyatt's success? Her uncanny ability to reinvent herself. Hyatt started out as the self-centered, pampered brat that everyone loved to hate, with every woman wanting to rub her face in the mud and every man wanting to turn her across his knee for a good spanking. She evoked strong emotions during her stints in World Class Championship Wrestling and the Universal Wrestling Federation in the mid-1980s, and often outshined her male counterparts, including "Hollywood" John Tatum and "Hot Stuff" Eddie Gilbert.

Yet Vince McMahon wanted her to give up her naughty ways and join the WWF as an affluent host of the "Missy's Manor" interview segment. It turned out that "Missy's Manor" was no "Piper's Pit," and the WWF and Hyatt parted ways in a matter of weeks.

So what's a girl to do? Hyatt returned to Jim Crockett Promotions, where television producer Dusty Rhodes made her a backstage interviewer and an occasional color commentator. She was one of the hottest stars of WCW during the early years of Ted Turner's ownership, managing The Steiner Brothers and The Nasty Boys, hosting a highly successful 900-line, and appearing on countless pieces of merchandise. Hyatt ended up suing WCW for what she considered her rightful share of the proceeds and all of it landed in court, where she also filed a sexual harassment claim.

With nowhere left to go, Hyatt accepted Paul Heyman's offer to appear in ECW, where she flourished as a sultry sex siren, whose conniving ways seemed to be a natural extension of the spoiled Southern belle she had portrayed a decade earlier.

Her out-of-the-ring exploits have embroiled her in controversy. In her 2001 tell-all autobiography, ***Missy Hyatt: First Lady Of Wrestling****, she detailed her relationships with John Tatum, Eddie Gilbert, Road Warrior Hawk, Jake Roberts, and* ***Wonder Years*** *star Jason Hervey, among others. Today, Hyatt lives in New York City with her two Jack Russell terriers, Milo and Jake. For fans who want to keep Missy under minute-by-minute surveillance, her pay website—missyhyatt247.com—offers a webcam that constantly streams video from her apartment. Hyatt's home website is missyhyatt.net.*

"Missy has revealed so many intimate details about her life in her autobiography and on her websites that I felt as if I already knew her," said Senior Writer Harry Burkett, who spoke with the self-proclaimed "First Lady Of Wrestling" for 90 minutes. "Her real personality is quite different from the 'vamp' persona she tries to project. She has a very sweet 'girl next door' quality."

Q: Despite the fact that you began your career 23 years ago, you've never strayed very far from the wrestling business. You still make appearances on the indy circuit. What are you up to these days?

A: I still have my websites, missyhyatt.net and missyhyatt247.com, and, yes, I still work the independents and do autograph sessions. I'm really proud of the work I've done with Women Superstars Uncensored over the past year or so. I do color commentary for WSU DVDs and I also host some "Missy's Manor" interview segments.

Q: What is your typical day like?

A: I work with Jack Russell terriers for an organization called Russell Rescue, not be confused with Dawn Marie's Wrestlers Rescue *[laughs]*. She takes in unwanted and abused wrestlers, and I take in unwanted or abused Jack Russells, so I'm sort of a foster mom. I recently took in a dog named Bruno, who had heartworm, and I kept him until that problem was cleared up and he could go to another family.

I do behavioral assessments on the dogs when they come to my home. Do they go after someone who's knocking on the door? Is there anything that seems to upset them? So I document all of that behavioral stuff on the paperwork. I also do home

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Interview photos by Stu Saks

It was then-boyfriend John Tatum who got Missy Hyatt into the wrestling business back in the mid-'80s. Tatum felt he needed a beautiful blonde valet—and the rest is wrestling history.

checks to make sure that prospective homes have the proper fencing, things like that. Jack Russells are very smart, but they also have so much energy that some people can't keep up with them.

Q: The question is, are *you* able to keep up with them?

A: My dogs end up adopting my personality, which means they become lazy and sleep in late. Dory Funk Jr. said that he grew up with a bunch of Russells, which are really handy if you have a working ranch with horses and stables.

Q: That sounds like enough to keep you busy. Do you have time to watch the current wrestling product, such as WWE and TNA?

A: Yes, there's a lot that I like about WWE and TNA. When I watch Raw or Smackdown, I just think how I'd like to work a big crowd like that. Back in the NWA and WCW in the late-'80s and early-'90s, we did pay-per-views every couple of months and drew decent crowds, but it was nothing compared to what WWE draws on nearly a nightly basis. I just think, *Wow. I'd love to see myself on that big TitanTron.*

I have a dream, and it sounds really corny, but I've always wanted to work one WrestleMania dressed as The Gobbledygooker. I'd want Kane to give me a tombstone piledriver and then rip off my turkey costume. Of course, I'd still have the beak and big feet, wearing a fur-kini, and I'd cluck around the ring and get back inside my egg. Some people dream about dollars or fame, but I've had a much simpler aspiration: to be The Gobbledygooker at WrestleMania!

Q: Maybe you weren't The Gobbledygooker, but you certainly came a long way. How did you break into the wrestling business?

A: I became involved through my boyfriend, John Tatum. He had been wrestling in Georgia and then went to work for the Crocketts for a while. He met Tully Blanchard and Baby Doll while he was there, and that's when John decided he had to get him a blonde girl who looked like Baby Doll. So, when he went to Texas, he took me along. [World Class referee] David Manning convinced me that I would make a good valet, and David and another referee, Rick Hazzard, helped me with that.

Q: What were you doing when John met you?

A: I was working as a cocktail waitress at a bar, the *Hyatt* Hotel—as a matter of fact—in downtown Atlanta. I also worked at the pool bar during the summer there.

Q: Where did you grow up?

A: Tallahassee, Florida.

Q: Had John been in the wrestling business very long when you met him?

A: No, no. He was from Pensacola, Florida, and he'd been in the business for only about six months, if that. He worked in Georgia and then the Carolinas for about 10 months. Then we went to Texas in '85.

Although Missy Hyatt and Sunshine were in-ring rivals in World Class Championship Wrestling (above), they were good friends outside the ring (right). Hyatt says Sunshine was a patient mentor during her early days.

"When I first started working, I was really nervous and scared. The first big thing I did was a catfight with Sunshine where we pulled hair and rolled around the ring, and I couldn't help laughing. When we got in the back, Sunshine yelled at me, 'You can't laugh out there!'"

Q: Had John always been a wrestling fan, or did he fall into it some other way?

A: John and Michael Hayes are cousins. Michael is from Pensacola, too. As for me, I fell in love with wrestling when I was 17. I was over at my parents' house, and I was upstairs with my dad, who was flipping channels. I saw Michael Hayes and Buddy Roberts putting a baby bonnet on Terry Gordy's head and a pacifier in his mouth, and they were all running around the ring. It was *Georgia Championship Wrestling*. I was amazed by what I was watching. What was this? I thought it was the coolest thing. I knew I didn't want to wrestle, but it seemed like a real hoot and something I wanted to do.

Q: Wow, that must have been when The Freebirds were feuding amongst each other. What was the first challenge you had to face as a valet in Texas?

A: Trying to figure out what my name would be! My last name is "Hiatt" with an "i," so I changed it to "Hyatt" with a "y." Also, my first name is Melissa, but my parents called me "Missy" and John caught on to that. That's how I became "Missy Hyatt."

When I first started working, I was really nervous and scared. The first big thing I did was a catfight with Sunshine where we pulled hair and rolled around the ring, and I couldn't help laughing. When we got in the back, Sunshine yelled at me, "You can't laugh out there!" But I was having so much fun. During my career, I've been paid a lot of money for what I love to do. If I didn't need money, I'd work in this business for free.

Q: I suppose World Class was ahead of its time as far as divas are concerned.

A: Let me tell you, we sure were! Looking back on it, I'm surprised that I got paid the same as the guys. They didn't just look at me as a female, but someone who helped draw people to the shows. My pay depended on where I was on the card and how many people were there. So I was paid extremely well, even though I was a woman. I think of all the people

Hot Stuff & Hyatt International UWF Tour
Hyatt & Hot Stuff International UWF Tour

Was it Hyatt and Hot Stuff International or vice versa? Either way, Hyatt and Eddie Gilbert made an effective and entertaining team in the Ultimate Wrestling Federation.

who helped me—Fritz Von Erich, David Manning, Bronco Lubich—and realize it was a great time. If Texas had been the only place where I had worked, and John and I had gone back to Florida right afterward, I'd still consider it the highlight of my life.

Q: Did it occur to you that women could add a whole new dimension to wrestling?

A: Sex and violence sell in movies and on TV, so why not wrestling? Even ultimate fighting has the octagon babes and boxing has the ring card girls in their little outfits.

Q: Your catfights with Sunshine must have gotten a huge response, considering the audience was definitely male-dominated at the time.

A: Because we did the same buildings each week, we had to come up with something new each week. For over a year, I'd do bad stuff to her on TV and then she'd beat my fanny all week at the house shows. I'd lie, or come up with a new way to insult her, and she'd be ready to tear into me again. It was so easy—and so fun to get a reaction. We nearly started a riot in Abilene, Texas.

Q: What was the road schedule like for World Class?

A: We did TV tapings every Friday night in Dallas and then we'd run a show on Monday night in Fort Worth. Every three weeks, we'd go to the outskirts, such as Lubbock, Amarillo, and El Paso. For the most part, though, most of the shows were in smaller towns within a couple hours of Dallas-Fort Worth. Football was really big in Texas, so there were plenty of large high school stadiums where we drew a lot of people—usually within 60 miles of Dallas.

Wrestlers and divas are so much like movie stars now because there's so much glamour. The outfits are so fancy and everybody's so polished. That's a big difference between now and the territorial days. Even WCW was much glitzier toward the end of my time there.

Q: Was Sunshine helpful when you first went to World Class?

A: She was the best. She taught me everything. And, trust me, I was a handful. You may remember that World Class had a two-hour show on Christian network for a while.

Q: Yes, the Christian Broadcasting Network.

A: That's right. [World Class booker] Ken Mantell gave me a line to use against Sunshine. It went something

"Sex and violence sell in movies and on TV, so why not wrestling? Even ultimate fighting has the octagon babes and boxing has the ring card girls in their little outfits."

like, "Sunshine's butt is so big that when she has to haul ass, she's got to make 10 trips." I said it verbatim. When I got backstage, poor Ken looked like he was having a heart attack, red in the face with his blood pressure going up. He told me that I shouldn't have said the word "ass." I said, "Yeah, but you *told* me to say that." I was so young at the time. I was surprised that CBN didn't even bleep it out.

Q: Well, the word "ass" was used in the Bible.

A: That's true. I felt sorry for Ken because he had to deal with these girls all of a sudden. But Sunshine and I were good friends. I'd have friends over at my apartment, and Sunshine would have to sneak through a window. Back in the kayfabe days, I couldn't party with the babyfaces, you know.

Q: Was there anybody else you looked up to? Or were you and Sunshine the only women around at that time?

A: There was Baby Doll with the Crocketts, and Miss Elizabeth had just started in the WWF. Here's one funny story: George Scott, who worked for Vince McMahon, had heard about Baby Doll at about the same time I sent pictures to the WWF. He contacted World Class, thinking I was Baby Doll. That's why David Manning and Fritz Von Erich wanted to keep John and me there. I'm glad John and I had that run in World Class, because I think we were great working together.

While working in the UWF, Hyatt often interacted with a young Jim Ross. According to Missy, nobody can match Good Ol' J.R. on the microphone.

Q: I thought so, too. How did you meet Eddie Gilbert?

A: I met him when we went to the UWF.

Q: When you first met him, did you think you'd ever marry the guy?

A: No! It was another case of life imitating art. That time was wild. We did the Hot Stuff & Hyatt International angle, and Ken Mantell was there … it was such a blur because we were traveling so much. I enjoyed that time very much.

Q: You mentioned that life imitates art. As we know, you left John and eventually married Eddie. Leading into that, John and Eddie were vying for your affections on UWF TV, with Eddie outsmarting John each week. The vignettes from that time were very funny. I remember a limousine pulling up to take you and John to lunch, and somehow Eddie elbowed his way into

Life imitates art. To John Tatum's chagrin, a UWF storyline romance between Hyatt and Gilbert evolved into an off-screen attraction and eventually marriage.

the limo so he could sit beside you. It was really funny stuff.

A: I remember that! Jim Ross was interviewing John, who was waiting for me to arrive in the limo. Eddie came out, noticed there was a TV in the limo, and squeezed himself into the car between John and me. I think we left Jim Ross just standing there. At that time, Eddie and I liked each other, so I guess it was happening and I didn't realize it.

Q: Wrestling is weird in that way, as far as life imitating art. It seems that every man and woman that are put together in a storyline end up as a couple in real life.

A: It may be terrible to mention this, but look at what happened to Chris and Nancy Benoit. There was also Steve Austin and Jeannie Clarke, and Steve and Debra McMichael.

Q: So you would say that love triangle among you, John, and Eddie mirrored reality?

A: On TV, Eddie and I always said it was "strictly business." But there was a lot of playing around and joking. Once when we were at the hotel in Tulsa, John had left with Jack [Victory], and Eddie got really drunk. Eddie came in from the pool, down the hallway, and passed out in my hotel room. I had to get Carl Fergie to get him out of there. The next day, I teased him all day. Something just sparked, I guess.

Q: You certainly demonstrated a sexual tension on TV. I remember that Eddie would refer to your group as "*Hot Stuff* & Hyatt International," but you would always refer to it as "*Hyatt* & Hot Stuff International."

A: Right. Bruce Prichard worked out of the Houston office at the time, and he had blue satin jackets made. Mine said "Hyatt & Hot Stuff" and Eddie's said "Hot Stuff & Hyatt." I don't know what happened to that jacket, but I wish I still had it. It would bring back good memories.

Q: Eddie was often credited for having a great wrestling mind. Did you learn things from him that you didn't learn from John or anyone else?

A: I learned more about wrestling as a business, from how it works to how to handle money. I learned what worked with a wrestling crowd and what did not. Eddie loved wrestling since he was a boy. His mom showed me how he would make up characters, book matches, lay out TV shows, and create whole storylines in his black-and-white composition books. He was really elaborate. He was the Agnes Dixon of wrestling.

Q: No wonder the CWF seemed like *All My Children*! Seriously, though, I know Eddie wrote for some fanzines and magazines in the late-1970s.

A: And he took pictures! He showed me a tape of a match where he and Jim Cornette were at ringside taking pictures.

Q: Cornette, Paul Heyman, and even Tammy Sytch got their start by taking pictures and sending them to our magazines. You never took pictures for us, but you sure posed for a lot. Tell me, how was the UWF different from World Class?

A: The traveling. I think they would sit there with a map of the United States and then throw darts to see how far they could make us drive. We'd be in Tulsa one night, and then have to drive to New Orleans, and then drive to Houston, and then to Memphis. It never made sense. We'd leave at 2:00 in the afternoon and not get back until 4:00 in the morning.

Q: I think the most common complaint I've heard about the UWF, or the Mid-South promotion that

> "You could see how hot and intense the crowd was on UWF TV shows. It was like a fever. The craziness was contagious. To me, it was more exciting in those days."

preceded it, was that it was a really big territory.

A: That's for sure. But you also made a lot of friendships when you're traveling together so much. I remember we'd all be in a van with One Man Gang driving—just a lot of camaraderie because we were working together every night. We were more like a family.

Q: At that time, the WWF was expanding nationwide. Fritz Von Erich and Bill Watts certainly entertained the thought of challenging Vince McMahon. Did World Class or the UWF have a chance?

A: If either World Class or the UWF had gotten a better foothold on cable, maybe so. The UWF was the hottest wrestling show on TV at the time, in terms of pure action. The show had enormous talent, in addition to Jim Ross as the announcer. And nobody can compare to Jim Ross as an announcer before or since. When we would tape shows in Tulsa, everything would break down at the end of the episode, so fans always wanted more. We didn't give away main events in those days.

"A total hoot," according to Hyatt, Paul Heyman and Paul E. Dangerously are one in the same. Heyman and Hyatt crossed paths in WCW and later in ECW.

Q: That's what I hated about the UWF! Hacksaw Duggan wouldn't tear into One Man Gang until one minute before the show went off the air. I would be screaming at the TV!

A: Yes, Jim Ross would be yelling, "We've got to go!" The whole idea was to get people to buy tickets. We didn't have pay-per-view yet, so the TV show was like an ad to sell tickets to the arena. We would do the TV tapings in Tulsa every two weeks. We never had to give away tickets for free because the arena was always packed. You could see how hot and intense the crowd was on UWF TV shows. It was like a fever. The craziness was contagious. To me, it was more exciting in those days.

Q: I suppose that's the price you pay when wrestling goes mainstream. Nowadays, you get more of a mainstream crowd, the same people who would come out to see the Harlem Globetrotters if they came to town.

The UWF must have had wide syndication back then, because I remember the UWF running its TV show in my home state of Maryland. That was a long way from Tulsa.

A: The UWF had really good syndication, but World Class was even more impressive. If I remember correctly, World Class had 223 stations—including stations in the Middle East—while the WWF had only 30 stations here in the United States.

Q: World Class even tried to run house shows in Massachusetts.

After a short stint with the WWF and some indy appearances, Hyatt made a move to WCW, where she made her name as a ring announcer (left), color commentator (above), and valet.

A: As well as Georgia and California while it was expanding toward the end. You knew one of these companies was going to become a true national company, but you didn't know which one would get there first.

Q: Who contacted you about going to the WWF?

A: Eddie and I just mailed in some pictures, and Vince called.

Q: Did he call for both of you?

A: Yes. It was a complicated time. There were rumors that Crockett was going to buy the UWF. We didn't know whether Crockett was going to swallow up the UWF or keep it separate. Some said he would honor the UWF contracts and others said he wouldn't. Eddie sent our stuff to the WWF just as back-up. But I wanted to go to the WWF because I wanted to be a big star and get me a doll. It still hasn't happened.

Q: Did Eddie ever wrestle for the WWF in the late-'80s?

A: He had first gone to the WWF in '81, but he didn't go in the late-'80s. He was helping Ken Mantell book for the UWF. When the buyout came, Crockett wanted Eddie to do all the booking for the UWF and Ken left. Eddie told Vince that he'd rather book for the UWF than just wrestle for the WWF. I was very pigheaded, though, and I wanted to go to the WWF and become a superstar.

Q: I remember "Missy's Manor."

A: Oh, gosh.

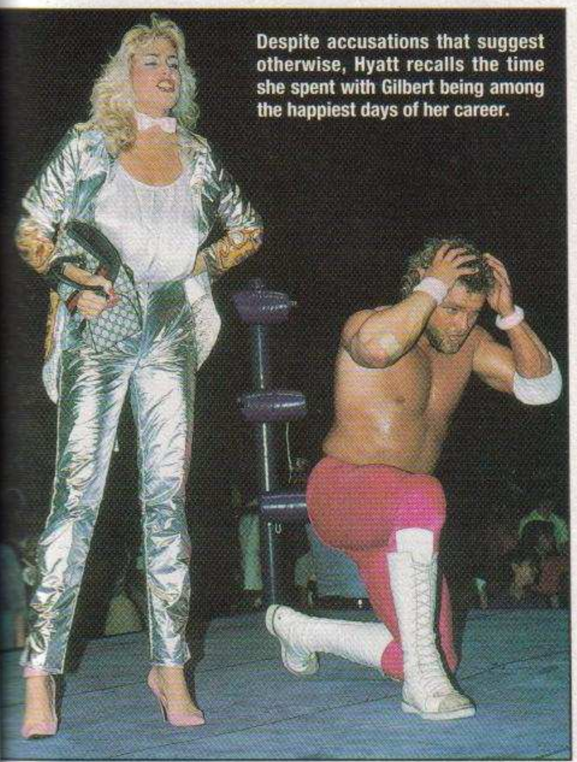
"I wasn't allowed to be myself. [WWF producers] were telling me what to say. It's very hard for me to read someone else's lines and make them my own. I didn't even wait for the crowd to respond; I was just trying to remember my lines."

Q: Is that the first thing they got you to do?

A: Yes, it was the only thing I did. I went to only three sets of TV tapings. The first couple were pretty bad. They're on my website. I think those are the only copies that remain from the suck pile. I think Vince had the rest burnt in a special ceremony.

Q: What went wrong?

A: I hadn't interviewed people before. When I asked Jimmy Hart a question, I didn't even hold the microphone toward him. I was waiting for an answer, but he was waiting for the microphone. Vince also wanted me to be a babyface. How can you be nice when you've built a career out of being such a snotty person? I had been in wrestling for only a couple of years, so I wasn't experienced enough. That's what was good about the territories: You could go somewhere else to polish your style and, the more you worked, the better you got.



Despite accusations that suggest otherwise, Hyatt recalls the time she spent with Gilbert being among the happiest days of her career.

Q: It would've been better if you could've portrayed an arrogant airhead. That way, your mistakes could've been part of your shtick.

A: I wasn't allowed to be myself. [WWF producers] were telling me what to say, almost like a script. It's very hard for me to read someone else's lines and make them my own. I didn't even wait for the crowd to respond; I was just trying to remember my lines.

Q: Was the WWF as exciting as you thought?

A: Yeah, it sure was. It was like going to the major leagues, like going to the "big show." I was so used to driving everywhere in Texas and the UWF that it was great to receive the star treatment in the WWF. There, we traveled on airplanes and stayed in nice hotels. I remember thinking, *Wow, this is pretty cool.* My first TV taping was at the UNLV Center in Las Vegas. The arena was huge, and sold out. I remember seeing that very cool "Missy's Manor" set. The WWF was first-class all the way.

Q: Did you remember anyone from your World Class or UWF days?

A: No, not at all. I was introduced to a lot of people, but I really didn't know anybody. Besides, I wasn't there very long. I left early during the third TV taping, and that was it.

Q: Come to think of it, you arrived in the WWF relatively early during the national expansion. The Mid-South crowd didn't really come until later in '87 and '88. What did you think of Vince McMahon? Did you meet him personally?

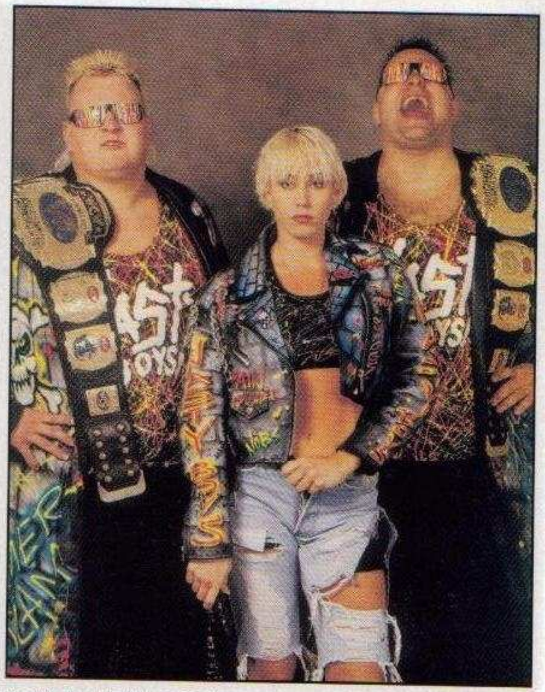
A: He worked with me on the "Missy's Manors." That was part of the problem. When the big dog is helping you do it, and you're not any good, you can't really ask for someone else to help you. So if he tells you what to do, and you stink, then you're out the door.

Q: Whose choice was it for you to leave?

A: After giving up on "Missy's Manor," Vince wanted me to become a Federette. I think we were going to do a thing where The Honky Tonk Man would start harassing me, and then I was supposed to start doing an interview segment where I would be standing up instead of sitting on a couch showing off my legs. I called Eddie, who was booking the UWF at the time, and told him that Vince wanted me to wear this Federette thing. Eddie said to tell Vince no thank you and come home.

Q: What did Federettes do?

A: They took ring jackets. Eddie said, "You're Missy



Due to her looks, nose for controversy, and risqué behavior, Missy's accomplishments as a tag team manager are often overlooked. Such achievements include guiding The Nasty Boys (above) and The Steiners (below) to great success in WCW.

"I had gone to Jim Crockett and told him that I wanted out of my contract because I'm going to New York and have me a doll! Then I had to go back with my tail between my legs and ask, 'Can I have my job back?'"

Hyatt, not a Federette!" If I had it to do over again, I would've put on that Federette costume in a heartbeat and bounced right out there!

Q: When you went to the NWA, you were a color commentator, weren't you?

A: Actually, I started that in the UWF. Remember, I had gone to Jim Crockett and told him that I wanted out of my contract because I'm going to New York and have me a doll! Then I had to go back with my tail between my legs and ask, "Can I have my job back?" Dusty said I would do interviews and commentary, which I loved doing. Dusty said we were going to show [the WWF] how to use a girl right.

Q: Did you like interviewing or managing better?

A: I liked them both for different reasons. My favorite experience in my career was working with John Tatum as his manager. But I also loved hosting those WCW shows with Jim Ross and Paul Heyman. Those were some of the best times.

Q: You managed a lot of other people, too, including The Steiners and The Nasty Boys.

A: I also managed The Barbarian, but I only did that a couple of times because he thought his wife was going to kill him for being with me. He and his wife are nice people. I also managed Sting and Eddie when we first went to the NWA after the buyout.

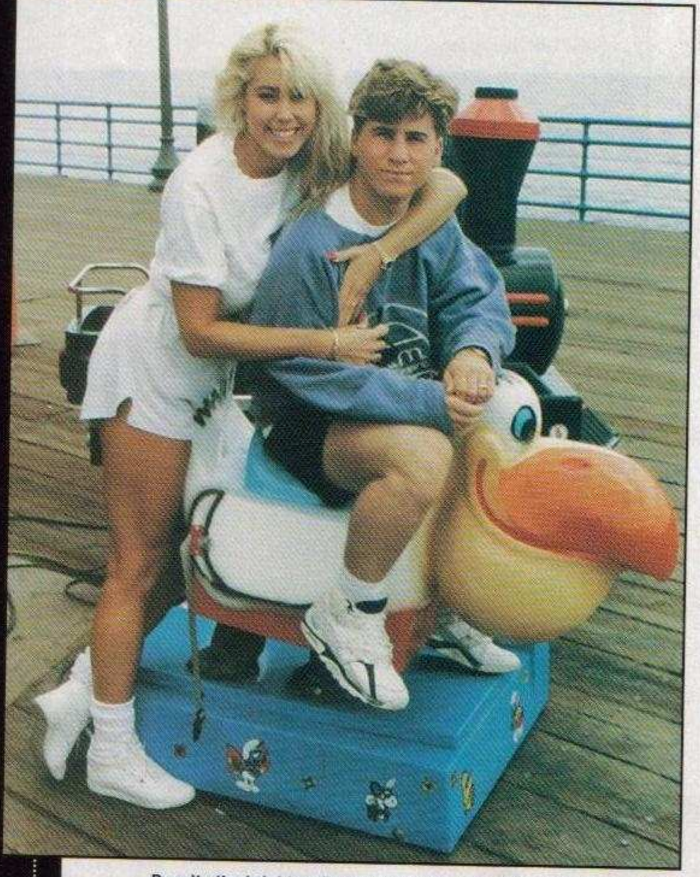
Q: Yes, I remember Eddie was a fan favorite when he went to the NWA. That was quite different for him. Now let's get to more controversial things. Could you explain the circumstances of your sexual harassment lawsuit and you leaving WCW?

A: All I really wanted was money from my hotline and merchandise. Basically, when I got my check, a couple of zeroes were missing from it. I went to a lady attorney, explained how much I had sold in terms of calendars and other WCW merchandise, and how much money my hotline made for WCW. My hotline cost 99 cents per minute, and I wanted to know how many people called and how long they stayed on the line. I had the highest rating of anyone, including the WCW World champion. I know my hotline generated over a million calls one year.

Q: People forget how hot those numbers were.

A: They do. WCW and West Interactive had a 60-40 split, and they generated $640,000 one year—and I couldn't get the numbers to see whether I was being ripped off. I never talked about wrestling on the hotline, though. I made up stuff, like *The National Enquirer*. One Sunday, I said, "I'll tell you which wrestlers are bringing their wives or girlfriends on the Bruise Cruise." The Bruise Cruise was an actual cruise where fans could join the wrestlers. Anyway, Rick Steiner yelled at me in front of everybody, saying he had a pregnant wife and he didn't want me spreading lies. It was like, "Chill out, Rick, it's only a work!"

So, basically, it came down to me wanting what was owed to me. I was also angry because a certain Bischoff person wouldn't give me the negative to an unflattering photo of me that had been put up at CNN Center. Part of my breast had popped out of my bra, and some of the guys put it on the wall, which hurt my feelings. I had a really good attorney who said that even my great, great, great-grandmother was upset by it. So my real issue didn't have much to do with sexual harassment, but about equal pay in the workplace. There's so much I never



Despite the bright smile and romantic pose, Missy insists her relationship with Jason Hervey, an executive producer for WCW, was orchestrated for TV.

equal pay in the workplace. There's so much I never got paid for: trading cards, video games, calendars, you name it.

Q: *Whoa*, let's go back to this picture for a moment. What were the circumstances of that photo being taken?

A: It happened at the last WCW pay-per-view I worked. The Nasty Boys were hurt and, because they had the belts, I jumped into the ring to stop the count. I was wearing a dress and jumped on Sting's back. Hawk was in there and he told me about my boob. The photographer got a shot of it. But it was just a little bit of the area. Someone had the picture blown up. And, six weeks later at CNN Center where we were doing promo shots, I saw it tacked onto the board there. Looking back, I can't believe the boys were so excited about that. It must have been way before the Internet, so they had to get their thrills somehow.

Q: Are you amazed that the women inside the ring today are able to keep it all in?

A: Yeah, but there's all kinds of new stuff now, like pop stick and double-stick tape.

Q: In your tell-all autobiography, you revealed that you had a number of relationships with various wrestlers. Which of those relationships do you look back upon with fondness?

A: Of course, Eddie and John. And I'd have to mention Hawk. I suppose I have a soft spot for the people who have passed away.

Q: We have many, many photos of you in our photo archives. I bet those pictures will bring back a lot of memories for you, especially those great shots we have of you and Eddie getting married that were taken in 1988.

A: Yes, I remember those well! When I wrote my book a few years ago, I couldn't find one picture of me with John. I didn't have any because Jason Hervey burned all my stuff, especially pictures of me with other guys. He really stunk.

Q: You must have liked Jason at the beginning. Why did you go out with him?

A: I didn't really like him. It was all just for TV.

Q: You can tell me the truth. He really buried Fred Savage, didn't he?

A: No, not really. Fred was so nice. He was making about a half-million dollars an episode, but his parents kept him on an allowance. I remember he wanted 20 bucks to go see the movie *Tombstone*. He hated tomatoes and stuff, so I went to Kraft Services and I made a pizza with all that plus mayonnaise and a bunch of other junk. I said, "If you eat that, I'll give you $10." I could make him do anything for money. But then when he realized we were getting such a big thrill out of him begging for money, he wanted to bicker about it and negotiate the price, and then it wasn't fun anymore.

Q: Jason Hervey and Eric Bischoff must have been good friends. After all, they still have a business partnership.

A: When Eric started in WCW, he and I hosted the WCW show that was broadcast in Canada. Eric also stayed at my house in California when he was out there trying to sell a kids team challenge show. Now, Eric and Jason produce Scott Baio's reality show.

Q: Eddie died in 1995. Did you see the wrestling lifestyle catching up to him, or did his death come as a complete shock to you?

A: I talked to him a few months before that because he wanted me to do the WWC's annual anniversary show in Puerto Rico. But I already had an autograph commitment, so I couldn't do it. His death was a real shock to me, very scary. I was working in New York at the time. I remember because it was so unusual for me to have a night off. Paul E. called and told me about it. It left me in such a daze, such a haze. I was in shock, asking what happened and why it happened. You never expect something like

> **"All I really wanted was money from my hotline and merchandise ... My real issue didn't have much to do with sexual harassment, but about equal pay in the workplace ... There's so much I never got paid for: trading cards, video games, calendars, you name it."**

that to happen, and it could happen in any family.

Q: Your departure from WCW, combined with Eddie's death, must have made that a tough period for you.

A: Yes. The last time I spoke with Eddie, he was asking if he could do anything for me. He even offered to do a deposition for my lawsuit. He was pretty cool about that. He also wanted me to come down to Puerto Rico and manage him during the anniversary show. He thought the fans would've gone wild down there.

Q: A short time later, another opportunity opened up for you. Did you enjoy working in ECW? Did you have trouble adapting to such a raucous environment?

A: I always wanted wrestling to stay fun, and ECW was fun. On my last ECW pay-per-view, I went on a long diatribe, cursing and using foul language. When Paul told me to say all of that, I couldn't believe it. We'd come a long way since I couldn't say the word "ass" on television. My teenaged niece and nephew saw it, and they laughed because they weren't used to me talking like that. I told them I was told to say it!

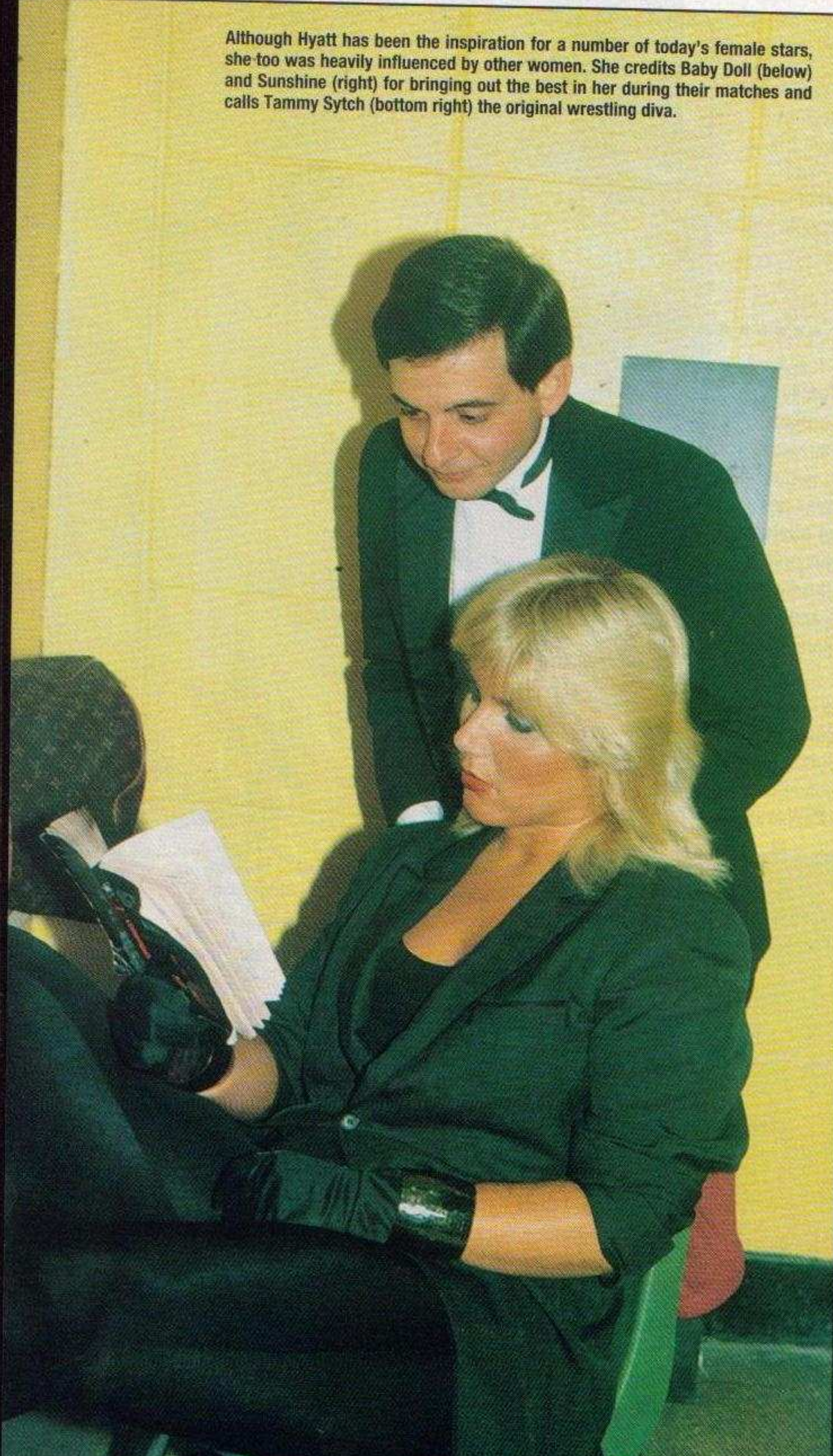
Q: You were involved in a funny angle with Stevie Richards. You kissed Stevie, and he slapped you with a sexual harassment lawsuit. Remember that?

A: Yes, that was to make fun of the whole sexual harassment thing. He served me with papers and put them in my bathing suit top and said, "You're served!" All of that was funny.

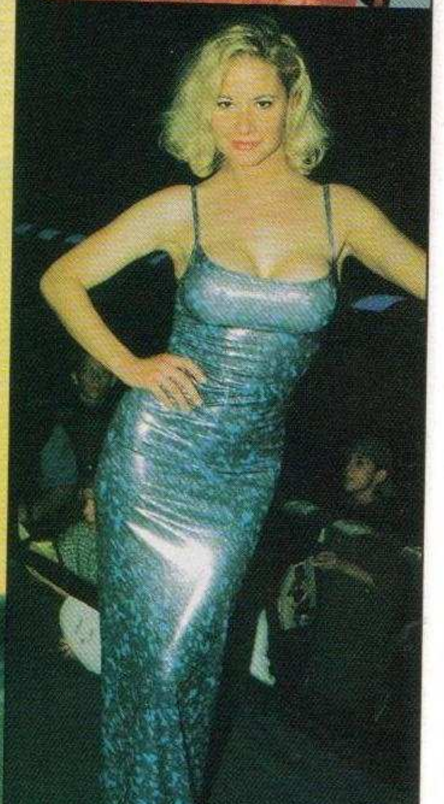
Q: What did you think of Paul Heyman as a talent in WCW and as the booker of ECW?

A: I met Paul when Eddie and I went to Memphis. I fell in love with Paul because he's such a hoot, always bigger than life. He really is Paul E. Dangerously. When Eddie got a booking job in Alabama, I told him that he had to get Paul. He'd already been fired from a couple of places. He complained so much about the booking in the AWA that Verne [Gagne] said, "If you think you can do a better job, then you do it." So Paul took the book, but he wrote everything in pen. As everybody knows, the booker writes everything in pencil in case something changes. But Paul did it in pen and ended up getting fired. There are many elaborate, funny stories

Missy was a key player in ECW's Sandman vs. Raven feud. As Sandman's valet, Hyatt spent a lot of time battling Sandman's wife, Lori Fullington, who served as Raven's valet.



Although Hyatt has been the inspiration for a number of today's female stars, she too was heavily influenced by other women. She credits Baby Doll (below) and Sunshine (right) for bringing out the best in her during their matches and calls Tammy Sytch (bottom right) the original wrestling diva.



> "I would never do or say anything to disrespect Eddie's memory. My comments were meant for Doug [Gilbert] only. Tod [Gordon] was wearing Eddie's jacket, so that's what caused some of the controversy."

relating to Paul. I aggravated Eddie so much that he finally hired him.

Q: You were criticized for an angle you did while part of an independent promotion based in New Jersey. You and Tod Gordon were part of a group of ECW wrestlers that invaded the promotion, and created a lot of controversy. Some fans construed some of your promos as being disrespectful toward Eddie's memory.

A: First of all, it was an angle against Eddie's brother, Doug. And I would never do or say anything to disrespect Eddie's memory. My comments were meant for Doug only. Tod was wearing Eddie's jacket, so that's what caused some of the controversy. I remember the NWA's anniversary show that was held there in New Jersey. Tod and the ECW boys got mad and walked out of the show, and left me stranded there.

In 2001, Hyatt made an appearance at the Brian Pillman Memorial Show. She got involved in the Evan Karagias and Chris Candido match, which resulted in a catfight with Tammy Sytch.

Q: Are you suggesting that this story has gained a life of its own over the years? I understand how that could happen, considering this was an incident that didn't air on television for everyone to see. So you don't think you did anything wrong?

A: No. I said something about Doug, but that was it. I would never, ever say anything bad about Eddie, even if he were still alive.

Q: Over the years, what women have you gained admiration for?

A: Baby Doll, definitely. Sunshine, because she taught me everything and was very patient with me. Sherri Martel, because she made me—the broomstick—look good in the few wrestling matches I've actually had. Little Jeannie, for all those times she wrestled the "Missy Hyatt special," meaning I ran around and pouted for four minutes and she spent one minute beating the crap out of me. Also Tammy, because I think she's the original diva. The camera loves her and she has so much personality.

Q: One final question: What can an aspiring diva learn from Missy Hyatt?

A: How to win at all costs—and how to flaunt what the doctor gave you! ☐

STRENGTH
BRISCOE

Photo by Joe Zanolle

Mark's Wrist Is Fine, The Briscoes Are Back, But ... TROUBLE'S AHEAD!

Former ROH tag team champions The Briscoe Brothers have battled through injuries and constant attacks from outsiders trying to make a name for themselves by taking down one of the most respected tag teams in the game. However, as they struggle to reclaim their vacated title, they may have to fend off another pothole in their path to glory—Austin Aries

BY AL CASTLE

THERE THEY WERE—Jay Briscoe and Austin Aries—seamlessly working together in their first team effort against Jimmy Jacobs and Tyler Black in May. They isolated the legal man into their corner, made quick tags, executed double-team maneuvers, and incorporated their own signature moves.

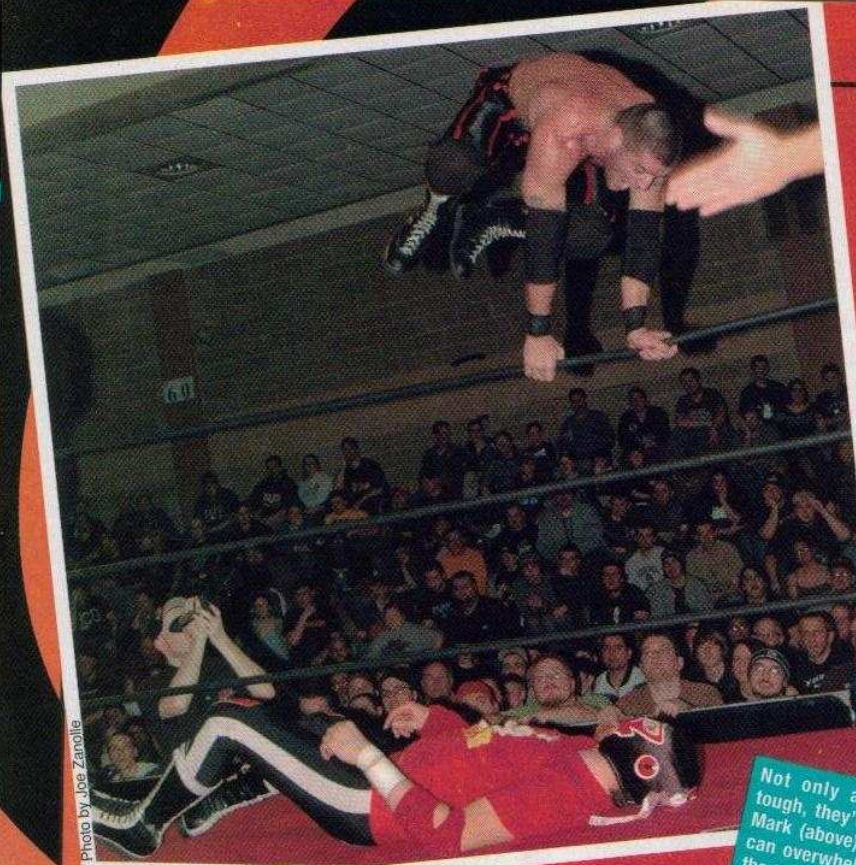


Photo by Joe Zanolle

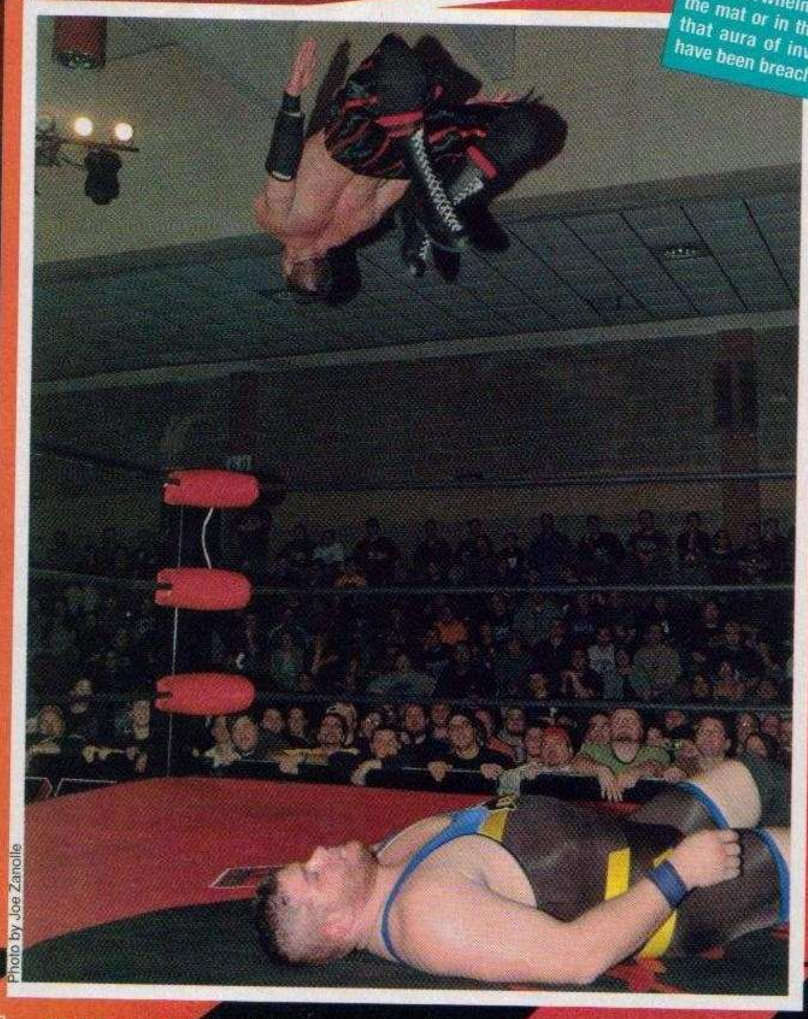


Photo by Joe Zanolle

Not only are the Briscoes tough, they're agile too. Both Mark (above) and Jay (below) can overwhelm opponents on the mat or in the air. However, that aura of invincibility may have been breached.

If you didn't know better, you might have thought the two men had been teaming together for years.

And that was the problem.

"I remember being a little ticked after my brother told me how well everything went," said Mark Briscoe, whose injury forced his brother Jay to defend their ROH tag team championships in the May 10 match with Aries as a substitute partner. "On one hand, I was happy. The Briscoe Brothers still had them belts. On the other hand, that wasn't no Briscoe in the ring with my brother."

Now, several months later, the Briscoes are back together and back in the tag team title hunt. But some observers wonder if they will live to regret ever having welcomed Aries into the fold and letting him in on the signature trade secrets of one of wrestling's most well-oiled tag team machines.

Even before his brief alliance with Jay Briscoe, Aries already had a solid foundation in tag team wrestling, having held ROH's tag team championship with Roderick Strong in 2005. In 2007, he led his three-man faction, The Resilience, to victory against many of ROH's top tandems.

But, it was in Aries' short-lived partnership with Jay Briscoe that many observers thought he had hit upon the perfect tag team chemistry. In Briscoe, Aries found a partner with the same snapping quickness, daredevil style, and never-say-die attitude upon which he had built his reputation.

"I've tagged up with Austin, and I know what a great partner he can be. But everyone who saw him with Jay noticed a spark of something really special," said former Resilience member Erick Stevens. "It was like Austin was the lost Briscoe Brother.

"And as much as I'm sure any partner can learn from Austin, it sure seems like Austin learned a lot from Jay," Stevens added.

It was both opportunity and a common enemy that brought Jay Briscoe and Austin Aries together. The unlikely duo came at a time when Aries seemed least likely to take on a partner, having spent months rejecting the recruitment attempts of the Age of the Fall and Tammy Sytch. But just as Aries had no use for the AOTF and resented the havoc they had wreaked on ROH, Jay Briscoe also had a score to settle with the stable. AOTF viciously attacked his brother, Mark, in April with a steel spike, forcing him onto the sidelines with his injury and putting the Briscoes' tag team championship in jeopardy.

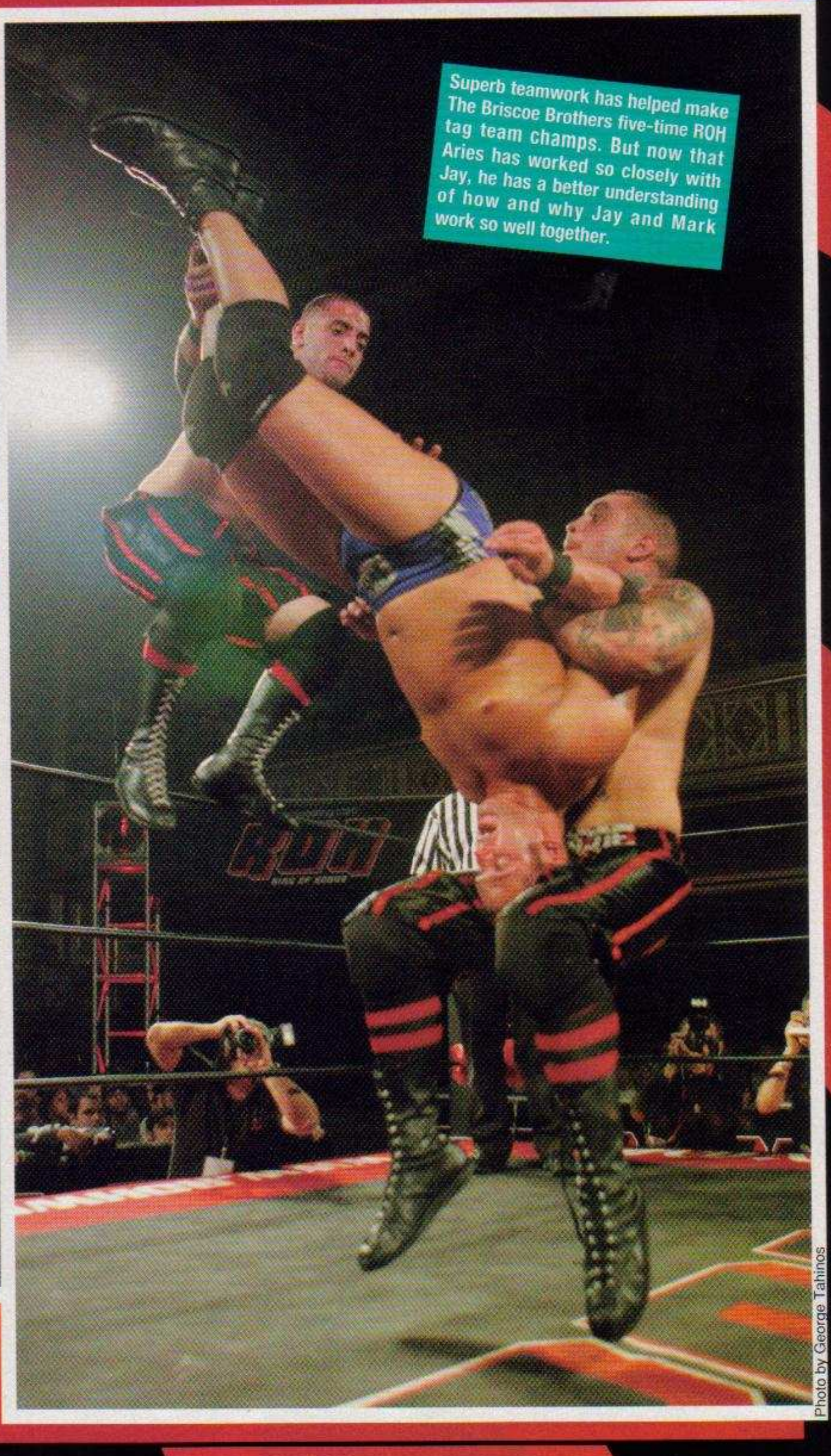
United in their purpose to dismantle the AOTF, the Briscoes reached out to Aries, and trained alongside of him to ensure the makeshift team put its best foot forward against Jacobs and Black.

The decision to bring in Aries as an interim partner may have proved wise at first, as the team was able to beat back the challenge of Jacobs and Black. But some observers speculated that the Briscoes' decision to vacate the tag team championship soon after the successful defense may have had little to do with their family loyalty.

"I don't care what excuse Jay and Mark gave for vacating the belts. The

Photo by Joe Zanolle

When Mark Briscoe went down with a wrist injury, Austin Aries proved to be an excellent interim partner for Jay. But their short-term success could have long-term consequences for Jay and Mark.



Superb teamwork has helped make The Briscoe Brothers five-time ROH tag team champs. But now that Aries has worked so closely with Jay, he has a better understanding of how and why Jay and Mark work so well together.

Photo by George Tahinos

WRESTLING'S ODDEST COUPLES

With a tag team championship hanging in the balance, wrestlers would like nothing more than to compete alongside their usual partner. But, as was the case in the brief partnership of Jay Briscoe and Austin Aries, tag team specialists have more than once been forced to take on an substitute partner. The results have been mixed:

The popular ethnic duo of Dominic DeNucci and Victor Rivera reached the top when they defeated The Valiant Brothers to become the 10th WWWF tag team champions in May 1975. But when Rivera made an unexpected exit from the WWWF just a month later, DeNucci was forced to choose a new partner to help him defend the straps. Irish journeyman Pat Barrett got the call, and helped successfully defend the titles for two months before dropping them to The Blackjacks.

The antics of The Moondogs may have terrified fans, but they also led King and Rex to defeat Rick Martel and Tony Garea for the WWF title in March 1981. But when Canadian-native Moondog King had problems getting past the border to defend the titles in the states, WWF matchmakers offered up a host of replacement partners for Rex. He finally settled on Moondog Spot. The New Moondogs lost the titles back to Garea and Martel in August.

Throughout the late-1980s, few teams were more dominant in the WWF than Demolition. But after winning their third World tag team title, Ax and Smash decided to shake up the formula by adding a third member to the mix—the young and towering Crush. During the spring and summer of 1990, Smash regularly teamed with Crush to defend the gold as Ax watched from ringside. The plan backfired when The Hart Foundation beat Smash and Crush for the belts at SummerSlam 1990.

In the summer of 1997, an untimely injury forced Steve Austin to go from one unlikely tag team championship partner to another. On Memorial Day, "Stone-Cold" reluctantly teamed with rival Shawn Michaels to win the title from Davey Boy Smith and Owen Hart. When Michaels was later injured, the titles were vacated, and Austin got the opportunity to win them back in another match against Smith and Hart. His choice: Dude Love (Mick Foley). The odd couple won the belts, and successfully defended them for three months until Austin fell with his own injury.

William Regal and Eugene formed an unlikely bond in 2004, after Raw general manager Eric Bischoff put Regal in charge of watching over his "special" nephew. So close did Regal and Eugene become that they won Raw's tag team championship in November of that year. When Eugene got hurt, Regal was forced to defend the title with Jonathan Coachman at an event in Winnipeg. Not surprisingly, La Résistance won their fourth tag team championship that night.

—Al Castle

fact is, Jay got a taste of how good a partner Aries was, and it scared him," said Kevin Steen, current ROH tag team champion, along with his partner El Genorico. "It was time to nip this thing in the bud, before it got out of control."

But it may have already been too late. Fans may have gotten a glimpse of the new team-oriented Aries dur-

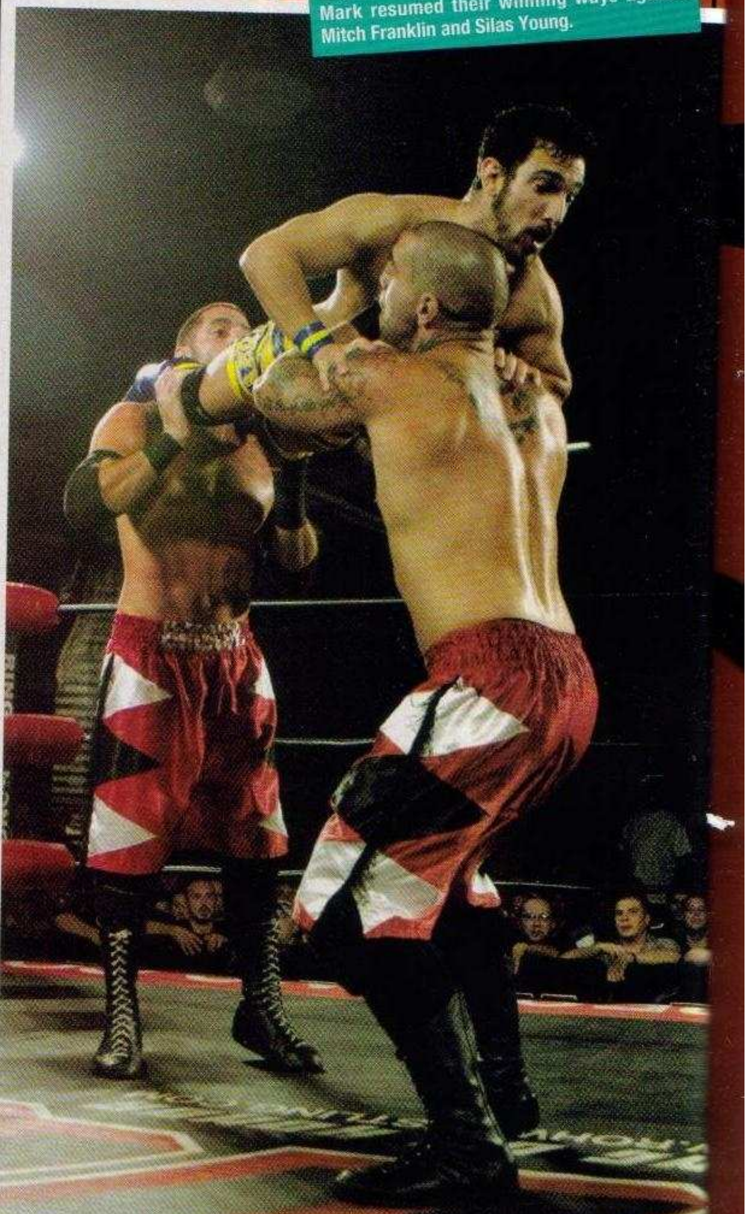


Photo by George Tahinos

After nearly three months of separation, the Briscoes reappeared in Detroit, Michigan, on July 26. Showing very little ring rust, Jay and Mark resumed their winning ways against Mitch Franklin and Silas Young.

ing the tournament to crown new ROH tag team champions after the Briscoes vacated their title. Teaming with Bryan Danielson, Aries made it to the finals of the tourney before losing to Black and Jacobs.

"I'd be lying if I said I haven't enjoyed doing the tag team thing lately. And yeah, some of that came from the fun I had with Jay," said Aries, who nevertheless downplayed the significance of the Briscoes' influence. "I don't need the Briscoes to teach me how to be a tag team wrestler. I've done it all here, including winning the ROH heavyweight championship. If anything, the Briscoes could have learned a thing or two from me."

Still, Aries' recent tag team performances made some observers wonder if the Briscoes had created a monster. Having picked up some invaluable skills from the Briscoes, all Aries needs now is a full-time partner. Once he finds him, Aries could become the biggest obstacle in the Briscoes' quest to reclaim the tag team championship.

RING OF HONOR
ROH
TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS

Photo by George Tahinos

Former tag team champions Jimmy Jacobs and Tyler Black had better keep their eyes wide open in ROH. It was the Age of the Fall's attack on Mark that caused the Briscoes to vacate the belts in the first place.

What's more, some locker room observers say Aries' inside knowledge of the Briscoes' playbook have forced the siblings to modify their offense, knowing that, in an inevitable tag team showdown in the future, Aries may have their number.

For his part, Jay Briscoe said the whole matter was a non-issue, and noted that both he and Mark teamed with Aries without incident in several six-man efforts against Jacobs, Black, and the Necro Butcher.

"That there's a lot of crap," Jay Briscoe said when told about the rumors of Aries stealing Briscoe secrets. "Man, I dug teaming with that dude, but we both knew I was always going back to my brother. Now me and Mark ain't worried one lick about the couple tips we gave Austin."

"What's that old saying, bro?" Mark added with a mischievous, gap-toothed smile. "We may have taught him everything he knows, but we didn't teach him everything *we* know." □

DON'T MISS PWI UPDATE WITH FRANK INGIOSI

EXCLUSIVELY ON: pwi-online.com

Pro Wrestling Illustrated Senior Writer Frank Ingiosi is insightful, provocative, and downright funny! You've read "The Trade's Mark" in *PWI*. Now check out Frank's column, "The Turn," every Friday afternoon.

Ingiosi on Mark Henry: "We've tried channeling our angst as a way to hopefully motivate Mark. You know, Internet-column tough love and whatnot. But, alas, our desires were met with more mediocrity and disappointment. At the very least we hoped Mark would ditch his angry image and just return to the always-lovable 'Sexual Chocolate'-style ways. Sadly, there would be no chocolate for us, sexual or otherwise."

Ingiosi on Jeff Hardy turning 30: "From all of us at "The Turn," happy birthday, Jeff. Keep up the great work. We wanted to get you something, but apparently there isn't a Cameron-area orthopedic surgeon that sells gift certificates."

Ingiosi on "Pacman" Jones in TNA: "Now we're left with a tag team in which one man can wrestle and the other's greatest contribution is taking his shirt off and scurrying around the ring goading his opponents into easily avoided situations. Does it work? No. Is it a draw? Can't imagine that it is. Is it insulting to the fans? Probably to some, yet they still go nuts for Team Pacman each time they enter the Impact Zone."

Frank Ingiosi ... on pwi-online.com!

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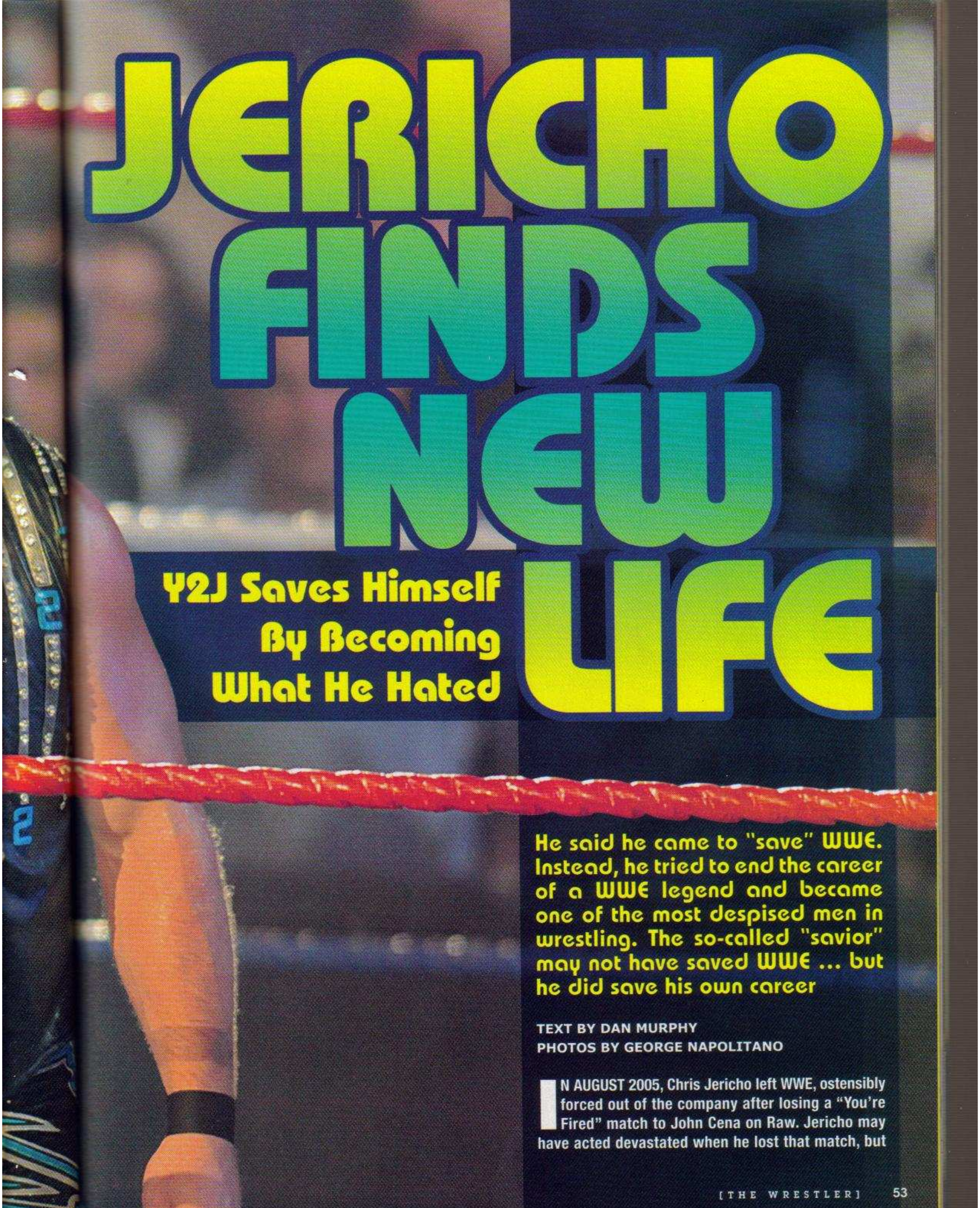


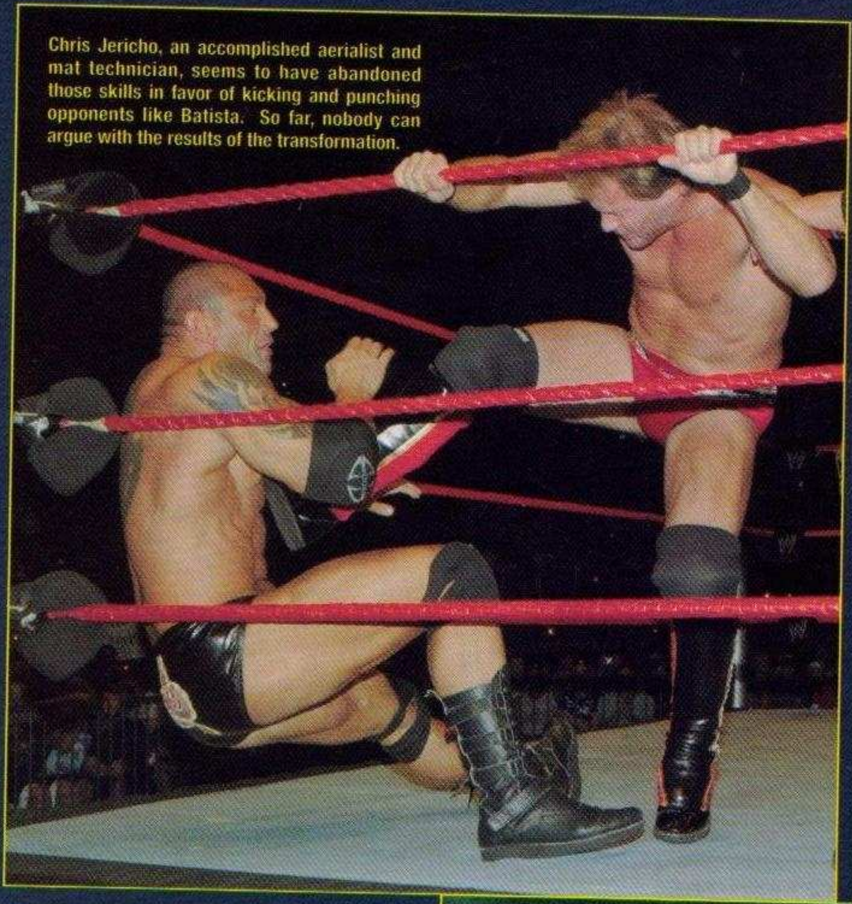
JERICHO FINDS NEW LIFE

Y2J Saves Himself By Becoming What He Hated

He said he came to "save" WWE. Instead, he tried to end the career of a WWE legend and became one of the most despised men in wrestling. The so-called "savior" may not have saved WWE ... but he did save his own career

TEXT BY DAN MURPHY
PHOTOS BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

IN AUGUST 2005, Chris Jericho left WWE, ostensibly forced out of the company after losing a "You're Fired" match to John Cena on Raw. Jericho may have acted devastated when he lost that match, but


Chris Jericho, an accomplished aerialist and mat technician, seems to have abandoned those skills in favor of kicking and punching opponents like Batista. So far, nobody can argue with the results of the transformation.

it didn't take him long to dive into new projects, recording music with his band, pursuing acting opportunities, and even writing his memoirs. His wife gave birth to twins and, for the first time in nearly 20 years, Jericho was able to stay home and enjoy quality time with his family. Life away from the ring was very good … but something kept beckoning him to return.

It wasn't championship belts. In 2001, Jericho had already done the unthinkable and become wrestling's first undisputed World champion in nearly 100 years. He had headlined WrestleMania, wrestled unforgettable matches, and entertained his legions of "Jerichoholics." He had surpassed every one of the wild childhood dreams he had as a skinny teenager growing up in Winnipeg, Alberta.

Yet there was still some unfinished business.

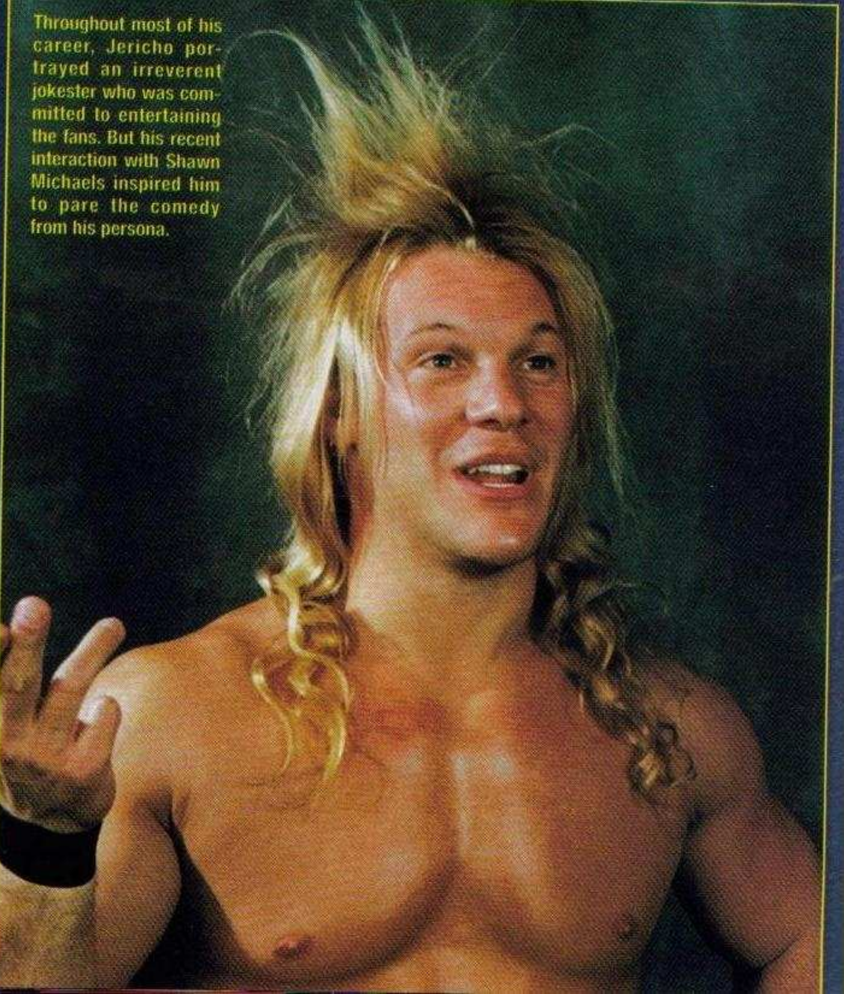
On November 19, 2007, Jericho made an electrifying return to Raw, ruining Randy Orton's "torch-passing ceremony," and ending weeks of speculation about the enigmatic "Save Us" messages that had been appearing on WWE programming.

The clock ticked down. Jericho emerged from a wall of pyrotechnics and soaked in a four-minute standing ovation. He announced "the second coming of Y2J" and promised "to ignite you, to excite you, to delight you" and that from this point forward it will be "100 percent entertainment, 100 percent electricity, 100 percent Jericho."

He was back, he said, to "save" WWE from boring, unentertaining wrestlers like Randy Orton. He was back to provide some excitement and to shake things up. The old "Sexy Beast" was back.

But the weeks that followed that memorable return were underwhelming. Jericho failed to unseat Orton for the World title at Armageddon and then got mired in a mid-card feud against John Bradshaw Layfield that sapped him of his momentum.

At WrestleMania, Jericho—the returning savior—was relegated to the "Money In The Bank" match, far removed from the main-event picture. The former undisputed champion was competing


Throughout most of his career, Jericho portrayed an irreverent jokester who was committed to entertaining the fans. But his recent interaction with Shawn Michaels inspired him to pare the comedy from his persona.

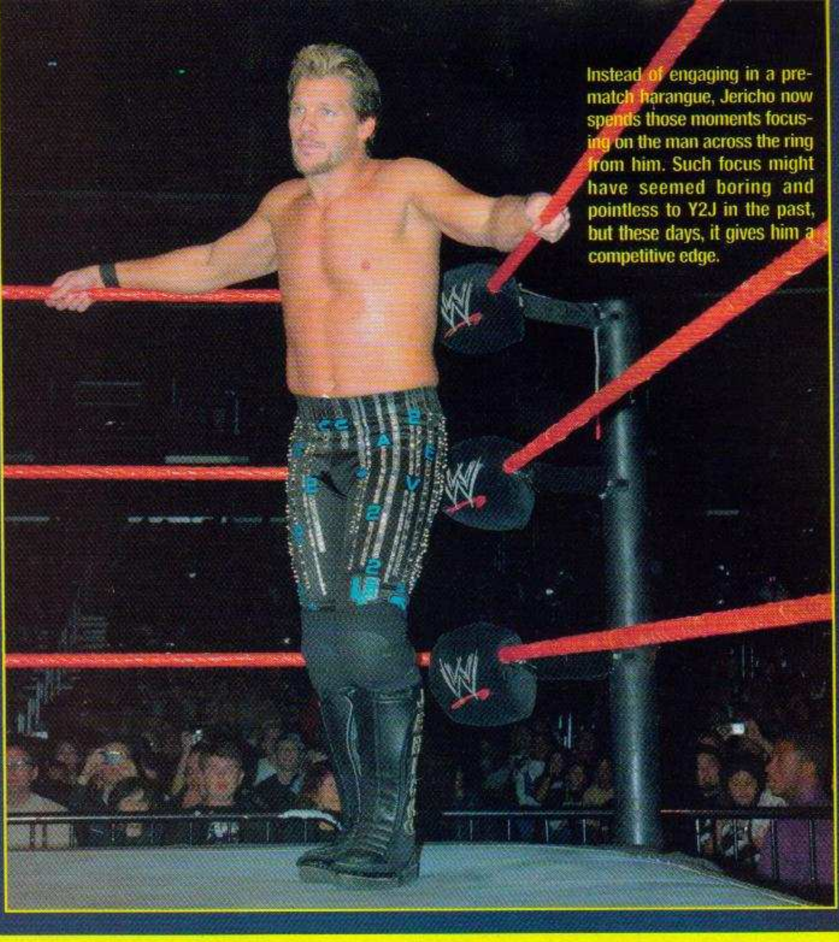
against six other wrestlers who had never held a world championship ... and he did not win.

An eighth Intercontinental reign was little consolation for a man with a grandiose plan of saving WWE, so Jericho changed his approach. He became exactly what he hated; he became a wrestler just like Orton.

"I've known Chris for a long time, and the Chris Jericho I saw on Raw is a very different guy from the guy I've always known," said Smackdown color commentator Tazz, who competed alongside Jericho in ECW more than a decade ago.

"Chris has always had a mean streak, of course, but he was always a showman," Tazz said. "He shot off his mouth, gave himself ridiculous nicknames, and wore all kinds of crazy hairstyles. Even when he was being an obnoxious jerk, he was a colorful character. These days, he's taking himself much more seriously. He's cut out all the catchphrases and goofiness. He's a new man."

A new man who happens to bear a striking resemblance to Orton. To beat Shawn Michaels, Jericho used the same



Instead of engaging in a pre-match harangue, Jericho now spends those moments focusing on the man across the ring from him. Such focus might have seemed boring and pointless to Y2J in the past, but these days, it gives him a competitive edge.

FIVE SIGNS THE NEW JERICHO IS FOR REAL

Despite being one of the very few undisputed World champions in wrestling history, Chris Jericho always seems to be left out of the conversation when discussing the greatest wrestlers of the modern era. Jericho won a record eight Intercontinental titles and defeated both The Rock and Steve Austin in one night to win both the WWF and WCW World championships. He's one of the most decorated wrestlers in the sport, yet Jericho always seems to take a back seat to wrestlers like Shawn Michaels, Triple-H, and The Undertaker. These days, even Randy Orton and Edge generally receive more critical acclaim and respect than Jericho.

But anyone who takes Jericho lightly is making a big mistake. Jericho is hungry and motivated. He may have back-doored his way to the World title at Unforgiven, but he's still a deserving champion. Here are five reasons why the new Y2J must be taken seriously, and why he may just be the most dangerous man in WWE today:

1. Jealousy. Jericho still seethes at the perception that he—even as undisputed champion—was a transitional titleholder and a pawn in the battle between Triple-H and Stephanie McMahon. He yearns to prove he is one of the top wrestlers of his time. He is on a mission to earn respect, which makes him extremely dangerous.

2. Legacy. Prior to his 2007 return, Jericho was largely remembered more for his comedy than his championships. All the titles paled in comparison to the time he spent with Ralphus and his handful of catchphrases. That irritated Jericho, especially as he relived those memories in writing his autobiography. It was during that process that he realized he needed to return to re-write his legacy.

3. Defying taboos. There are lines wrestlers do not cross. Trying to permanently blind a man, and then punching that man's wife squarely in the face, goes beyond any boundaries of decency. Jericho knew that. He was sending a message not just to Michaels, but to the entire WWE locker room. He will do anything he needs to do to achieve his goals, and he's willing to seriously injure anyone who tries to stop him.

4. Confidence. Jericho honestly believes that all of his actions to date are justifiable. He has no scruples about anything he has done, and will not hesitate to sink to even lower depths. He has utter confidence in his moral authority and doesn't second-guess anything he does. No man is as dangerous as a man who believes beyond all shadow of doubt his every action is justified.

5. Strategy. Jericho may have lost his match against Michaels at Unforgiven, but he had the foresight to ensure the match was not sanctioned. In essence, the loss barely affected his standings in the rankings. He goaded Michaels into the match while maintaining his own position. For the first time in his career, Jericho is the one playing mind games and not reacting to his opponent. He is planning every single move he makes, like a general slowly picking apart an opposing army.

—Dan Murphy

strategy that kept Orton atop WWE for much of the past year; he tried to intentionally injure him.

Besides adopting a more aggressive, cut-throat wrestling style, Jericho has cut back on his high-flying moves and is using a more conservative ground-based style. He has changed his look and begun competing in trunks instead of his trademark long tights. All those Jericho hallmarks—the entertainment, the electricity, the personality—are no longer part of his persona. He has changed his look, his style, and his image, and he has gone from the midcard to the World championship.

Jericho, however, has a different interpretation of his transformation. "I haven't changed a bit. I just realized it was time to grow up," he said. "I spent years putting my neck on the line to entertain those fans and be the best wrestler I could be, and they reward me by cheering for a disingenuous lowlife like Shawn Michaels. Michaels is a manipulative ass. He's a lying, two-faced despicable individual, but those idiot fans pop for him like he's some kind of hero.

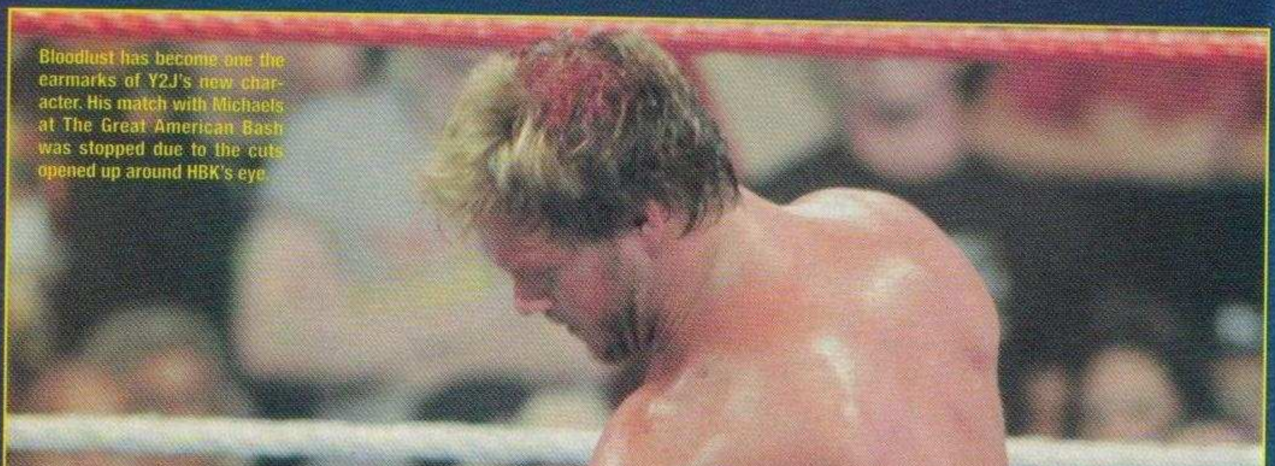
"If a miscreant like Michaels gets that kind of adulation, then I don't want the fans to cheer for me," Jericho said. "I have exposed Michaels for the fraud he is. And, as for me, this title belt shows I'm the best wrestler in the world today."

Like Orton, Jericho has developed a major chip on his shoulder. He has become bitter at the world and is venting his frustration on anyone who steps in his path, and that approach has made him a much more dangerous and effective wrestler.

"Jericho has always been a hell of a wrestler, but he's never had this kind of focus or edge to him," Tazz said. "I can't approve of some of his actions, but I've got to admit, he may be wrestling better now than at any time in his career."

For the first time in years, Jericho is being taken seriously. He's earning respect and writing an unexpected new chapter to his career. Jericho is no longer interested in saving WWE. He's saved his own career and become World champion again.

The question now is: Who can save us from Chris Jericho? □



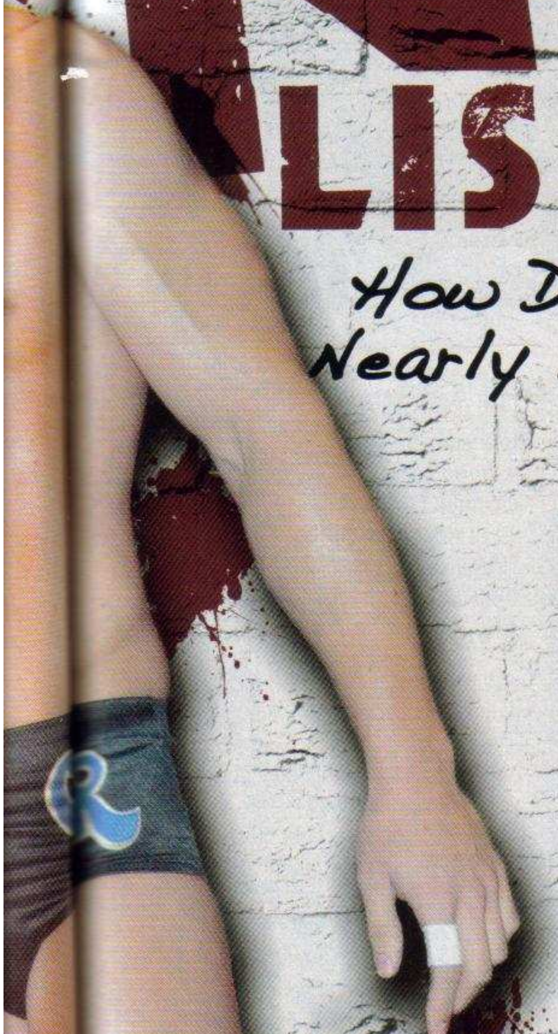
Bloodlust has become one the earmarks of Y2J's new character. His match with Michaels at The Great American Bash was stopped due to the cuts opened up around HBK's eye.

Photo by George Napolitano

WE'RE NOT LISTENING!

How DiBiase Jr. & Rhodes Were Nearly Derailed By Their Dads

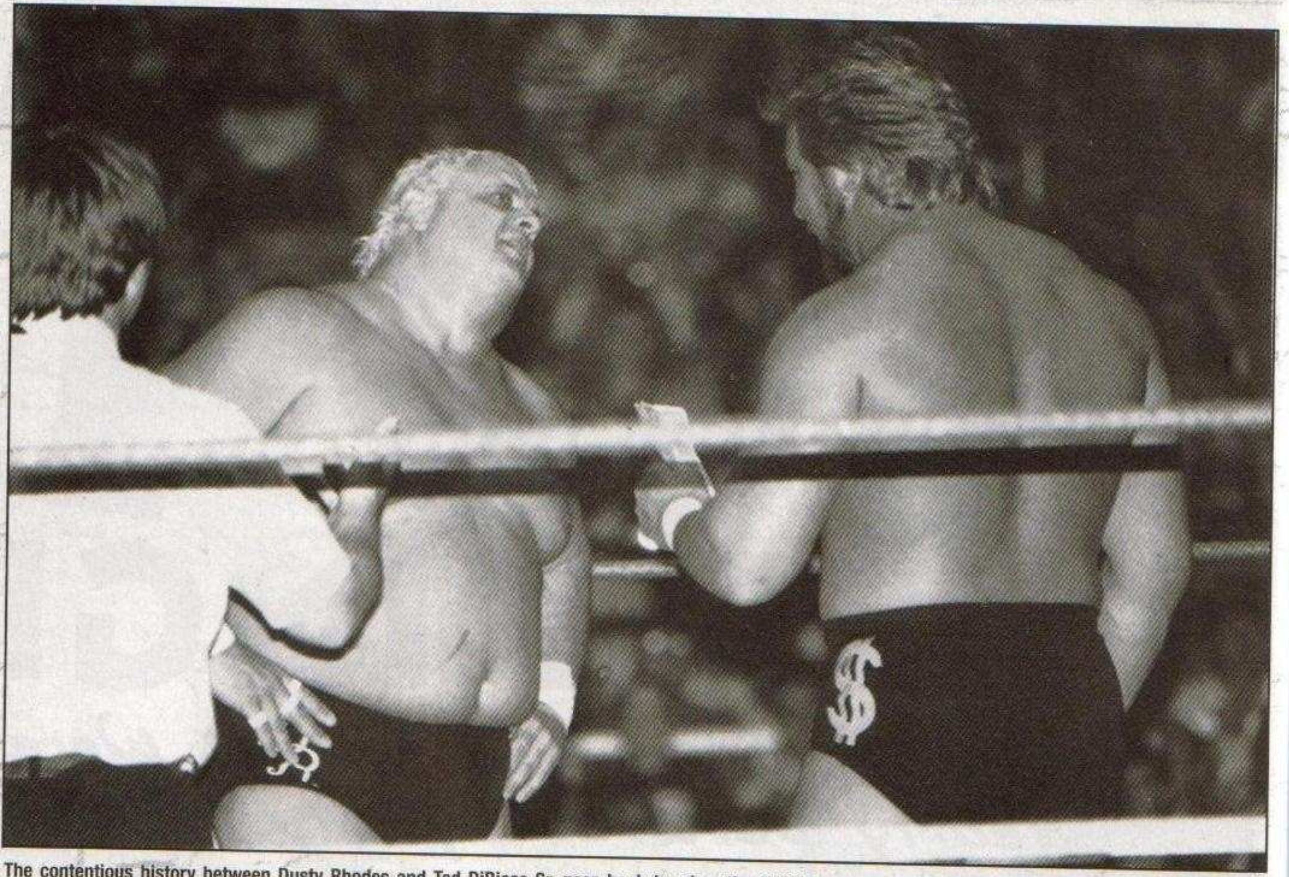
Ted DiBiase Sr. doesn't trust Dusty Rhodes, and the "American Dream" certainly doesn't trust the "Million-Dollar Man." So why does the bond between Ted DiBiase Jr. and Cody Rhodes seem unbreakable?



BY HARRY BURKETT

"CODY RHODES PROVED something that I've said for many, many years: Everybody's got a price!" Ted DiBiase Sr. said as he let loose with his evil laugh while watching his son, Ted Jr., and Cody Rhodes on the backstage monitor, preparing for a match against The Highlanders on Raw. "A cash transaction might not have taken place, but Teddy promised Cody fame and fortune. That's why Cody turned on Hardcore Holly and that's why Teddy and Cody are the World tag team champions."

Obviously, the legendary "Million-Dollar Man" has fond memories of that fateful night in June when DiBiase Jr. and a mystery partner were slated to face WWE World tag team champions Rhodes and Holly. It turned out that Rhodes was DiBiase's mystery partner, as he went on to DDT Holly, enabling DiBiase to plant Holly with the Million-Dollar legsweep and win the belts for his newly



The contentious history between Dusty Rhodes and Ted DiBiase Sr. goes back to when the "Million-Dollar Man" tried to bribe Rhodes (above). When the "American Dream" refused, they clashed (below). Clearly, these men do not trust each other and had some very pointed advice for their sons, the WWE World tag team champions.

formed team. In effect, Rhodes remained a World tag team champion; he simply changed partners.

It was a profitable acquisition for "Simply Priceless" Ted DiBiase Jr., a third-generation wrestler who—along with second-generation star Cody Rhodes—was preparing to declare war on WWE's veterans, much like Randy Orton had done a few years earlier. But isn't the elder DiBiase, who has cleaned up his act outside the ring in recent years, ashamed of his son's methods?

"This is the wrestling business. Leaving partners behind and making new alliances are all part of the strategic game to move your career forward. The time had come for Cody to ditch Holly and form a partnership with Teddy," DiBiase Sr. said. "But, with that said, Ted needs to be careful. For as much as he should trust that Rhodes boy, he should be wary."

From the very beginning it seems, the fathers of both tag team champions were warning their sons of what could happen. DiBiase Sr. taught his son to do what is best for himself, and make sure no one gets in his way, while Dusty was teaching Cody that he needed to do the right thing,

Following his father's example, Ted DiBiase promised Cody Rhodes big things in WWE in exchange for his tag team partnership. So far, Rhodes has profited from the arrangement, much to Dusty's disappointment.

and live the same way he would like to be treated. This tag team seems perfect on paper—both come from a championship lineage, have talent seeping from every pore in their bodies, and have the hunger to become better than their fathers ever were in the ring—but both Dusty and Ted know how similar they were to their own fathers and how similar their own sons are to them.

"My only concern is that Cody's old man will stick his nose in their business," said DiBiase Sr. "I had a few problems with Dusty in the past, we weren't what you would call 'friends.' I worry for Teddy that some day, old Cody may decide he needs to right some great wrong he feels he's doing by his actions now. And that old dad of his will be the one egging him on from behind.

"But I think Dusty understands that these boys have to find their own way, for now. I still don't think that means he hasn't hinted at that boy of his to keep an eye open for a better opportunity. Remember, Dusty and Dick Murdoch back-stabbed and beat the heck out of a lot of guys before Dusty became the 'American Dream.' In fact, I warned him that DiBiases and Rhodeses don't really mix."

Cody's actions have to come as a disappointment to his father. Even when Dusty's relationship with his oldest son, Dustin, was tumultuous, he could always depend on honest, reliable, no-nonsense Cody. While Dustin—as Goldust—was sending love notes to Razor Ramon, Cody was getting A's on his report card. While Dustin was struggling in the dying days of WCW, Cody—as a high school junior—was going undefeated en route to winning the 189-pound amateur wrestling championship in his home state of Georgia. While Black Reign was forming a bond with his pet rat, Cody was defending the WWE World tag team title with Hardcore Holly.

Now this son has gone astray, soiling the Rhodes name as he and DiBiase Jr. take every shortcut imaginable and take every opportunity to spit on the legends that built the sport. Cody is no better than Randy Orton, who sidelined the "American Dream" with a vicious punt kick last year.

"I don't know how 230 pounds of blue-eyed soul could have gone so wrong," said Dusty Rhodes in his first public comments regarding his son's heel turn. "I see this strappin' young man, my own flesh and blood if you will, actin' like that no-good Randy Orton, spittin' in the face of men like Jerry 'The King' Lawler and 'Hacksaw' Jim Duggan, and I'm downright ashamed.

"When Cody first did this thing, and left Hardcore Holly layin' in that ring, I said don't get involved with that DiBiase clan. That's nasty business. That's dancin' on the dark side."

Ted DiBiase Sr.'s Million-Dollar Dream:
DESTROY THE RHODES FAMILY!

Nearly 18 years have passed since Ted DiBiase Sr. feuded with Dusty Rhodes in the WWF, but there are a small number of conspiracy theorists who believe the "Million-Dollar Man" is using his son, Ted DiBiase Jr., to set up the "American Dream" for the worst heartbreak of his life. Sure, Rhodes made a lot of enemies during his career, but DiBiase is the only one to try to harm the son of a plumber through his personal relationships.

Remember sweet Sapphire? She was the sassy, roly-poly valet for the polka-dotted "Common Man" during his final run in the WWF. Dusty and Sapphire were an unlikely couple, whose dance moves and fun-loving shuck-and-jive made them a beloved duo. In 1990, Rhodes found himself in a rivalry with Ted DiBiase, who turned the feud intensely personal when he paid Sapphire to turn against "The Dream."

Then DiBiase decided to go one better. He repeatedly tried to bribe Dusty's son, Dustin, to turn against his father. This led to a notorious incident in which DiBiase rammed a wooden chair into Dustin's head, prompting the elder Rhodes to howl in anguish over his bloody son. Although DiBiase and his manservant, Virgil, scored a tainted victory over the father-son tandem at the 1991 Royal Rumble, it always galled the "Million-Dollar Man" that neither Dusty—nor his son, Dustin—had a price.

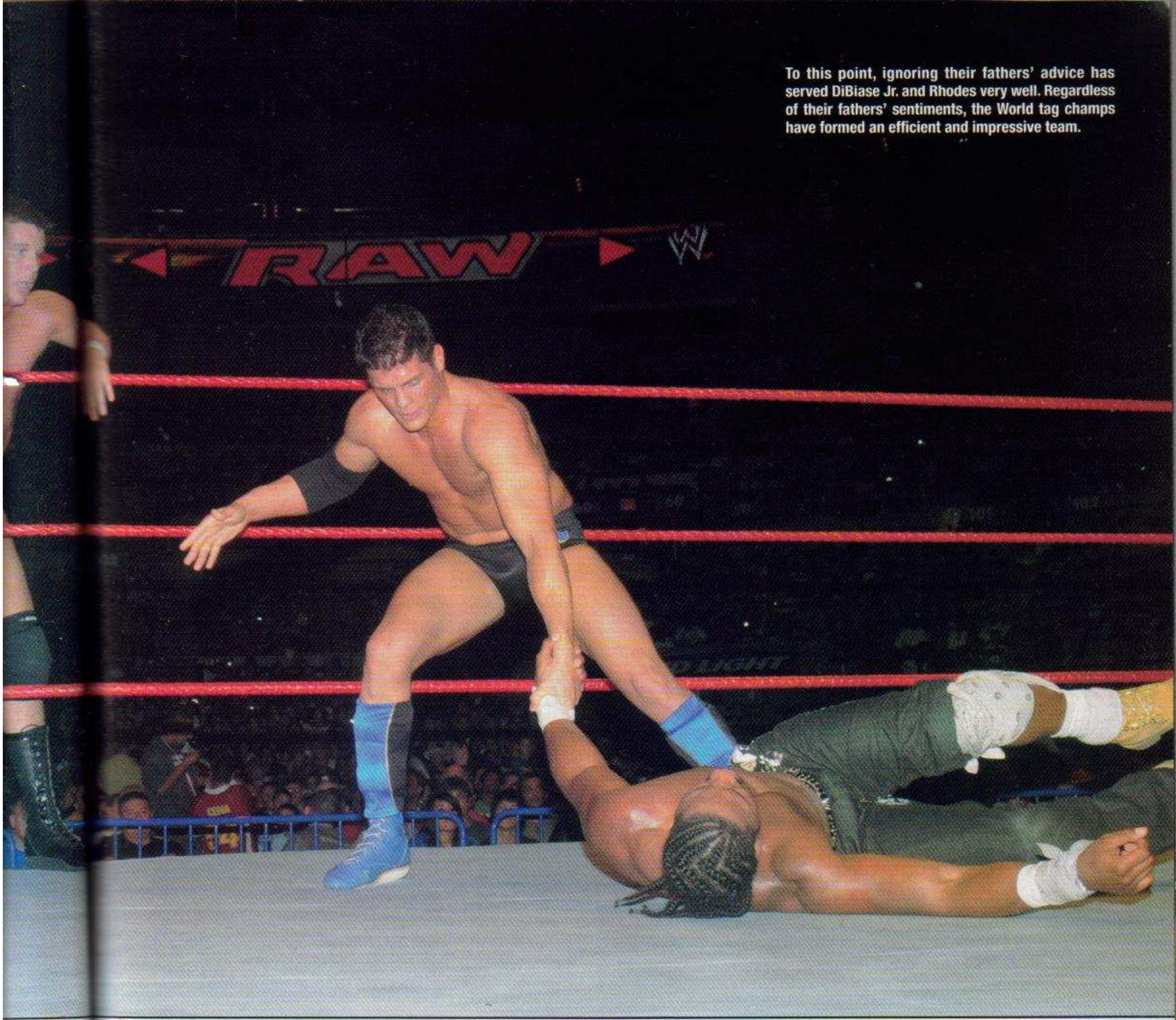
Fast forward to 2008. Ted Sr. hasn't exactly offered Cody Rhodes a wad of cash to turn against his father, but some insiders allege the "Million-Dollar Man" could be using a much more subtle approach: using Ted Jr. to poison Cody's mind. Under Ted Jr.'s influence, Cody has already targeted veterans such as Jerry Lawler and Jim Duggan. Could the "American Dream" be next?

—Harry Burkett

Sapphire: The "Million-Dollar Man" got to her

Dusty had every right to be a little worried. In his time with the WWF, he and Ted Sr. didn't always have the most personable of relationships. Dusty got to see firsthand just how evil the "Million-Dollar Man" could be, and even worse, turn good people his way. Doing what any good father would, Dusty tried to warn Cody of the temptations that the money, and power, of working with Ted Jr. could bring.

"You see, I don't have a price for the 'Million-Dollar Man.' Never did, never will. And that son of his don't seem no better. But I made Cody a promise, an oath, and a vow when he broke into this business: I would not second-guess his



To this point, ignoring their fathers' advice has served DiBiase Jr. and Rhodes very well. Regardless of their fathers' sentiments, the World tag champs have formed an efficient and impressive team.

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decisions and there's nothing that he could do in that ring that would diminish the love I have for him. But, for his own sake, he needs to watch Teddy Jr. like a hawk eyein' a rattlesnake. I don't trust Junior DiBiase because I don't trust Daddy DiBiase. They're bad news, Jack."

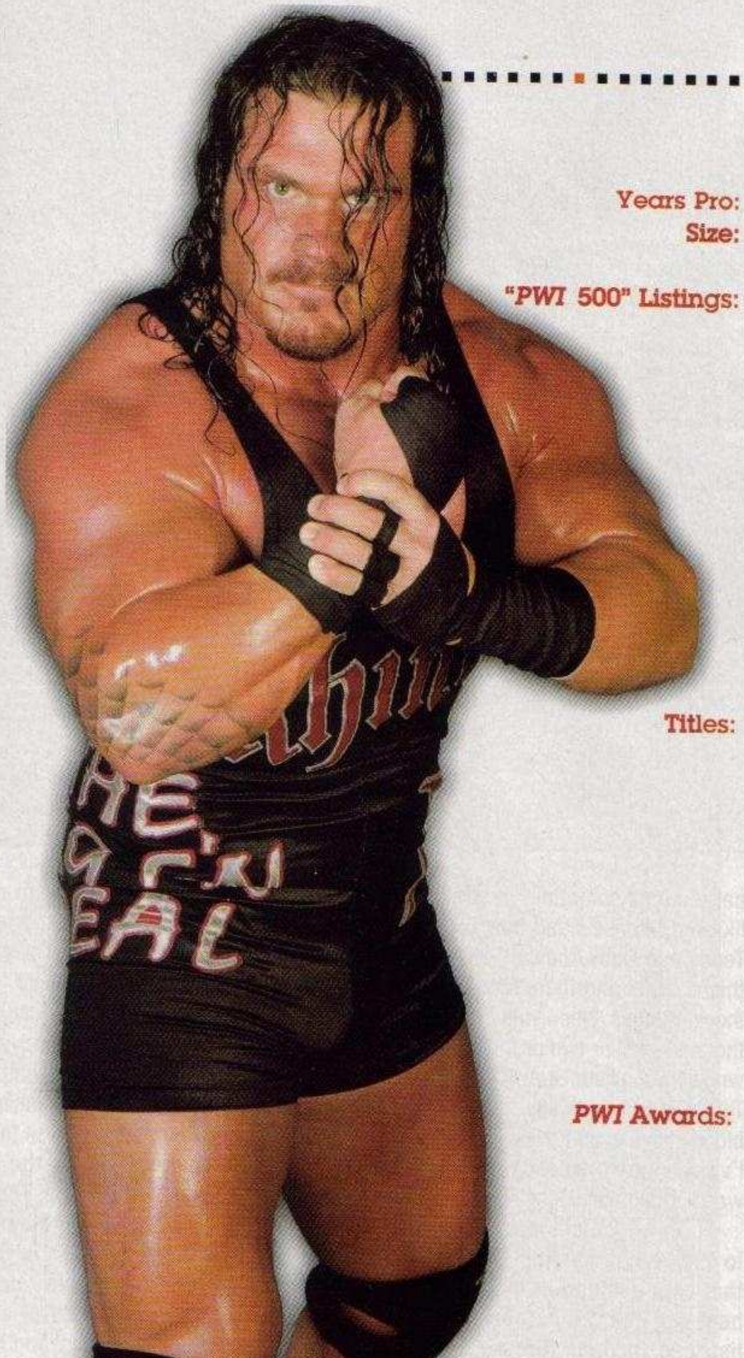
And what about Ted and Cody? Are they genuine friends who trust each other, or is this merely an alliance of convenience? Are they heeding their famous fathers' advice?

"I understand why Teddy and Cody's old men are cautious about this whole thing," commented Afa Anoa'i Jr., who recently debuted on Raw as an ally of the World tag team champions. "Everybody's paths cross sometime in wrestling, just like Ted DiBiase's and Dusty Rhodes' did. Teddy and Cody know all about that, but this is 2008 and there's no need to hold those grudges. When your family's been in the business for two or three generations, wrestling's in your DNA. The bond between Teddy and Cody is stronger than any bad blood between their dads. Take it from me: I've seen my own dad kiss guys that he was headbutting 20 or 30 years ago."

For now, the champions have chosen to ignore their parents. They have found that with each other, they are truly the best tag team out there. If they had listened to their fathers, the current WWE World tag team champions may have ended up languishing in mid-card singles purgatory. This doesn't mean that someday their fathers' words won't creep into their heads and a struggle for power won't ensue, it just means these two have shown that they are beyond whatever bickering their fathers once had.

Both Ted Jr. and Cody realize there's something about this business that—over time—makes brothers of the bitterest adversaries and vice-versa. Ted Sr. may not trust Dusty or any of his sons, and Dusty may not trust Ted Sr. or any of his sons, but what they have taught their boys and the legacy they helped create is what binds their two sons. And that bond is simply priceless. ☐

THE WRESTLING ANALYST



RHINO

Years Pro: 14
Size: 5'10", 275

"*PWI 500*" Listings:
2008—61
2007—39
2006—42
2005—157
2004—Not listed
2003—Not listed
2002—Not listed
2001—10
2000—19
1999—241
1998—Not listed
1997—398

Titles:
ECW World
ECW TV (2 times)
NWA heavyweight
WCW U.S.
WWF hardcore (3 times)
Border City Wrestling Can-Am TV
Catch Wrestling Association tag team (2 times)
European Wrestling Promotion heavyweight
International Championship Wrestling Palladium brass knuckles
Jersey All-Pro Wrestling heavyweight

***PWI* Awards:** None

[THE NUMBERS]

Offense (9.0): Rhino utilizes maneuvers that do not rely on speed or momentum from the ropes, but are based on sheer power. Using his low center of gravity, he can execute pumphandle slams, power bombs, and Death Valley drivers with ease. Rhino is pure, raging, snorting adrenaline in the ring.

Defense (8.5): He often responds like a trapped animal when caught in complex holds, and that's why he has had trouble against thinking man's wrestlers such as Christian Cage, Robert Roode, and Jeff Jarrett. The Detroit native is better at countering leverage-based moves—such as bodyslams and suplexes—by shifting his weight.

Experience (9.0): We'd prefer that he acted more cagey and a bit less like a caged beast. He has shown maturity when confronted with demeaning situations outside the ring, such as James Storm trying to goad him into drinking alcohol; yet blind rage often forces him to make rookie-type mistakes during matches.

Conditioning (8.5): Fortunately, Rhino has resisted a middle-age spread as he approaches his mid-30s. Sure, he's compact and carries decent girth, but he has managed to keep his weight around 265 pounds. Rhino can keep pace with any heavyweight in TNA.

Science (8.0): Rhino learned the basics at Scott D'Amore's Can-Am Wrestling School in Windsor, Ontario. To his detriment, he has not advanced his scientific game much beyond that point. ECW, WWE, and TNA packaged Rhino as an uncivilized brute and wanted him to stay that way.

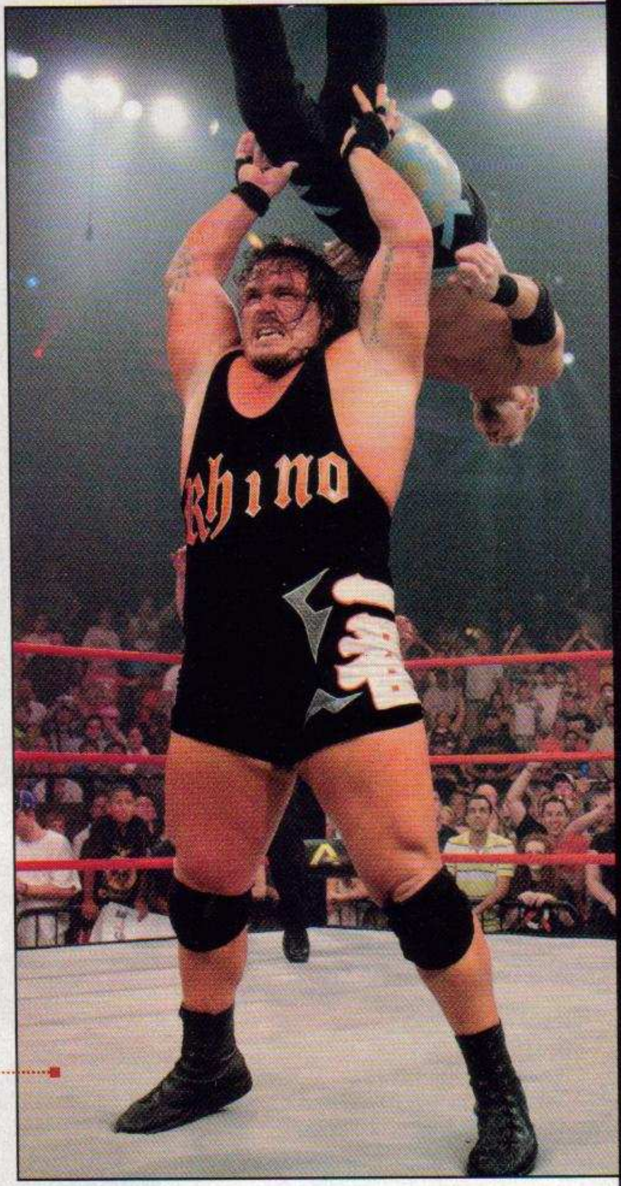
Stamina (8.5): "The War Machine" has participated in some of the most dangerous contests in wrestling history—including TLC, "Elevation X," and "King Of The Mountain" matches—and has performed superbly. He does quite well against men who are 50 pounds lighter.

Power (9.5): Rhino doesn't stand mid-ring and flex his muscles. He possesses dynamic power, able to burst into a high-impact move at an instant. His renowned finisher, the gore, is the best example of that. The argument could be made that Rhino's gore is more devastating than Bill Goldberg's spear ever was.

Speed (8.5): Rhino isn't quick; he's sudden. He somehow musters big bursts of energy when necessary, leaping off the mat with a running shoulderblock or springing toward his opponent with a gore to the midsection. Rhino's agility was on display in his successful effort against James Storm in an "Elevation X" match back in March.

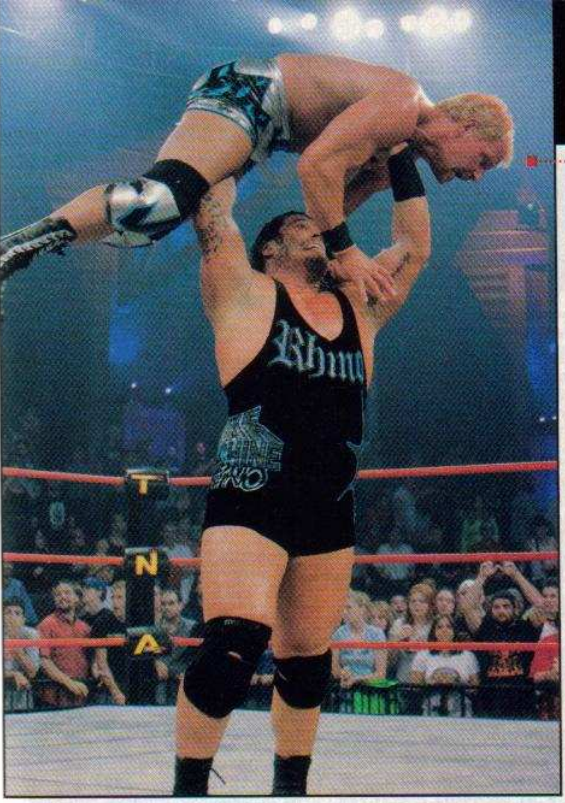
Ability To Absorb Punishment (9.5): Rhino doesn't try to avoid punishment. He runs straight toward it, specifically when he gores his opponent through a table propped in a corner. In fact, that was his regular finisher when he competed in the original ECW. This mastodon will never submit.

Quality Of Opposition (9.0): He is dominant amid TNA's very competitive mid-card pack. Rhino is capable of dominating wrestlers such as Robert Roode, James Storm, Travis Tomko, and Abyss in singles competition, and reuniting with Christian Cage has made him a factor in the tag team ranks for the first time in his TNA career.



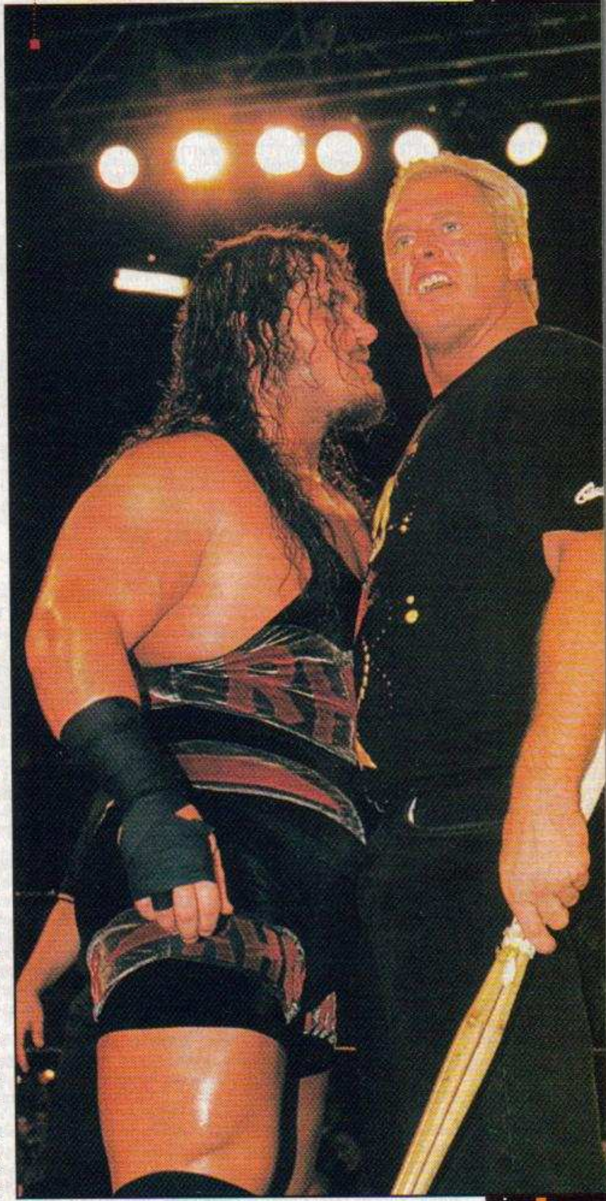
① **Rhino isn't known for his high-flying maneuvers or his skilled groundwork. But, what he lacks in finesse, he makes up for in brute strength. As he tosses Christian, Rhino demonstrates the power that makes him a threat to any wrestler in TNA.**

② Rhino's gore is one of the most devastating moves in the business, capable of incapacitating veteran wrestlers such as Booker T (above). As if the maneuver isn't painful enough, Rhino occasionally augments his gore with a table (right).



③ **One of Rhino's top accomplishments was his NWA heavyweight championship reign in TNA. Unfortunately, though, Jeff Jarrett ended the "War Machine's" reign after just two days. Rhino will need to put together some longer title reigns to stave off the underachiever label.**

④ **Winning his first ECW World title from The Sandman was Rhino's crowing achievement to date. Not only did he win it a second time, he was the last man to wear the strap when ECW folded in 2001.**



[THE ANALYSIS]

Repertoire: Although Rhino is fully capable of using devastating maneuvers mid-ring, his execution is downright wicked when he can catch an opponent off the ropes and plant him with a belly-to-belly suplex or a spinebuster. He has been known to execute piledrivers off the second rope and through tables. We advise Rhino to reintroduce the sharpshooter, which he often used during his WWE run.

Strengths: Despite his struggle with alcoholism, he has never suffered from a lack of self-confidence in the ring. He surrounded himself with winners—specifically Edge (then known as Sexton Hardcastle) and Christian Cage—at the very start of his career. Later, he adopted Steve Corino as his mentor, a move that enabled the "Rookie Monster" to springboard to the ECW World title at the young age of 25.

Weaknesses: Neither Rhino's skill set nor his persona has evolved very much over the past decade. The Rhino of 2008 is the same as the Rhino of 1998. While running buddies Edge and Christian have reinvented themselves numerous times during their careers, Rhino is still grunting and goring, thinking those two attributes will make him a main-eventer. He makes Vader seem multifaceted.

Defining Career Moment: On January 7, 2001, The Sandman had just beaten Rhino's mentor, Steve Corino, for the ECW World title in a tables, ladders, chairs, and canes match. Rhino immediately challenged The Sandman for the belt, and used a gore through a table to end Sandman's reign within a couple of minutes. To this day, Rhino is ruthless with vulnerable prey.

Future: In the September 2000 issue of *The Wrestling Analyst* magazine, we correctly predicted that Rhino might capture the ECW TV title or the ECW World championship. But he has been an underachiever ever since. Tommy Rich celebrated when Rhino became the shortest-reigning NWA champion of all-time, losing the belt to Jeff Jarrett after two days. Perhaps he can kick-start his career as a tag team specialist. □

OFFICIAL RATINGS

TOP 10

1 **TRIPLE-H**
269, Greenwich, CT
(1) WWE heavyweight champion

2 **CHRIS JERICHO**
220, Winnipeg, Manitoba
(–) WWE World champion

3 **SAMOA JOE**
290, Samoa
(3) TNA World champion

4 **BATISTA**
318, Washington, DC
(4) No. 1 contender: WWE World title

5 **KEIJI MUTO**
245, Yamanashi, Japan
(-) IWGP champion

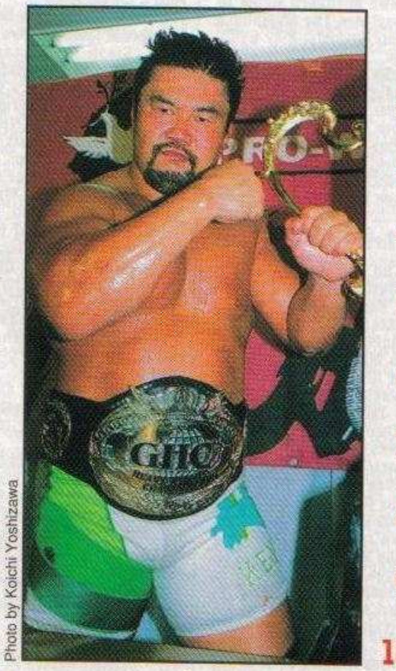
6 **MATT HARDY**
213, Cameron, NC
(10) ECW heavyweight champion

7 **KURT ANGLE**
233, Pittsburgh, PA
(–) No. 1 contender: TNA World title

8 **KENSUKE SASAKI**
254, Fukuoka, Japan
(–) GHC heavyweight champion

9 **NIGEL McGUINNESS**
220, London, England
(–) ROH heavyweight champion

10 **SUWAMA**
265, Fujsawa, Japan
(–) AJPW Triple Crown champion



Kensuke Sasaki

Photo by Koichi Yoshizawa

TAG TEAMS

1 **TED DiBIASE JR. & CODY RHODES**
Combined weight: 467 pounds
(2) WWE World tag team champions

2 **JAMES STORM & ROBERT ROODE**
Combined weight: 475 pounds
(4) TNA World tag team champions

3 **CARLITO & PRIMO COLON**
Combined weight: 458 pounds
(-) WWE heavyweight tag team champions

4 **TOGI MAKABE & TORU YANO**
Combined weight: 488 pounds
(8) IWGP tag team champions

5 **KEVING STEEN & EL GENERICO**
Combined weight: 400 pounds
(–) ROH tag team champions

6 **TAIYO KEA & MINORU SUZUKI**
Combined weight: 434 pounds
(9) AJPW Universal tag team champions

7 **HOMICIDE & HERNANDEZ**
Combined weight: 515 pounds
(1) No. 1 contenders: TNA World tag title

8 **PHOENIX STAR & ZOKRE**
Combined weight: 328 pounds
(6) NWA tag team champions

9 **CURT HAWKINS & ZACK RYDER**
Combined weight: 435 pounds
(3) No. 1 contenders: WWE tag title

10 **SEBASTIAN SLATER & JOE HENNIG**
Combined weight: 470 pounds
(–) FCW tag team champions

WWE RAW

World Champion:
CHRIS JERICHO
(5) 220, Winnipeg, Manitoba

1—BATISTA
(1) 318, Washington, DC
2—C.M. PUNK
(C) 210, Chicago, IL
3—KANE
(8) 326, St. Louis, MO
4—JOHN B. LAYFIELD
(2) 309, Roscoe, TX
5—REY MYSTERIO JR.
(9) 163, San Diego, CA
6—SANTINO MARELLA
(10) 227, Calabria, Italy
7—KOFI KINGSTON
(4) 225, Jamaica
8—SHAWN MICHAELS
(6) 217, San Antonio, TX
9—WILLIAM REGAL
(–) 240, Blackpool, England
10—CHARLIE HAAS
(–) 249, Dallas, TX

SMACKDOWN

Champion:
TRIPLE-H
(C) 269, Greenwich, CT

1—JEFF HARDY
(4) 212, Cameron, NC
2—THE UNDERTAKER
(–) 299, Death Valley
3—SHELTON BENJAMIN
(3) 245, Minneapolis, MN
4—THE BIG SHOW
(9) 485, Aiken, SC
5—VLADIMIR KOZLOV
(8) 310, Moscow, Russia
6—THE GREAT KHALI
(1) 420, Bombay, India
7—R-TRUTH
(–) 228, Charlotte, NC
8—BRIAN KENDRICK
(10) 175, Fairfax, VA
9—KEN KENNEDY
(5) 246, Green Bay, WI
10—MVP
(7) 252, Miami, FL

ECW

Champion:
MATT HARDY
(1) 213, Cameron, NC

1—MARK HENRY
(C) 380, Silsbee, TX
2—FINLAY
(4) 230, Belfast, Ireland
3—CHAVO GUERRERO JR.
(3) 210, El Paso, TX
4— MIKE KNOX
(7) 260, Amarillo, TX
5— EVAN BOURNE
(6) 177, St. Louis, MO
6—TOMMY DREAMER
(2) 260, Yonkers, NY
7—JOHN MORRISON
(8) 204, Hanover, WV
8—RICKY ORTIZ
(–) 256, Paradise Valley, AZ
9—JACK SWAGGER
(–) 285, Perry, OK
10—GAVIN SPEARS
(–) 225, Niagara Falls, Ontario

TNA

World Champion:
SAMOA JOE
(C) 290, Samoa

1—KURT ANGLE
(2) 233, Pittsburgh, PA
2—BOOKER T
(1) 250, Houston, TX
3—CHRISTIAN CAGE
(9) 239, Toronto, Ontario
4—A.J. STYLES
(3) 202, Gainesville, GA
5—SHEIK ABDUL BASHIR
(–) 203, Tehran, Iran
6—MATT MORGAN
(7) 330, Fairfield, CT
7—PETEY WILLIAMS
(5) 235, Windsor, Ontario
8—CONSEQUENCES CREED
(–) 202, Marietta, GA
9—JAY LETHAL
(–) 190, Elizabeth, NJ
10—ABYSS
(–) 354, Parts Unknown

Top 10 and tag team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (–) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue. Note: In an effort to keep the ratings as up-to-date as possible, these pages are often the last to be sent to the printer. Thus, the ratings may reflect changes not reflected in the remainder of the issue.

FOR PERIOD ENDED September 26, 2008

ANARCHY CHAMPIONSHIP WRESLTING: Champion—Scot Summers; **1**—Jimmy Jacobs; **2**—Mike Dell; **3**—J.T. Lamotta; **4**—Skylar Skelly; **5**—Awesome Andy; **6**—Chris Hero; **7**—Shawn Vexx; **8**—Arik Cannon; **9**—Sara Del Rey; **10**—Rexx Reed.

CHAOTIC WRESTLING: Champion—Alex Arion; **1**—Scott Reed; **2**—Bryan Logan; **3**—Brian Milonas; **4**—Chase Del Monte; **5**—Brian Fury; **6**—Matt Logan; **7**—Don Chesterfield; **8**—Mikaze; **9**—Psycho; **10**—Sledge.

CHIKARA: Champion—Vin Gerard; **1**—Hallowicked; **2**—Delirious; **3**—Fire Ant; **4**—Claudio Castagnoli; **5**—Mike Quackenbush; **6**—Player Uno; **7**—Player Dos; **8**—Lince Dorado; **9**—Eddie Kingston; **10**—Colin Delaney.

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—Frederick of Hollywood; **1**—Chase Del Monte; **2**—Freak Nastty; **3**—Ace Darling; **4**—Glen Osbourne; **5**—Bryan Logan; **6**—Prince Nana; **7**—Matt Logan; **8**—Scott Wright; **9**—Mega; **10**—J.J. Crew Guy.

IMPACT ZONE WRESTLING: Champion—G.Q. Gallo; **1**—602 Wrecking Crew; **2**—Hawaiian Lion; **3**—Dean Radford; **4**—Ryan Lynch; **5**—Sergio Vega; **6**—Jay Garland; **7**—Dread Pirate; **8**—Tony Trouser; **9**—Mike G.; **10**—Jack Bull.

IWF: Champion—Kevin Knight; **1**—Justin Corino; **2**—Damian Adams; **3**—Biggie Biggs; **4**—Franciz; **5**—Tony Torres; **6**—Travis Blake; **7**—Chris Steeler; **8**—Vik Voorhees; **9**—Frank Scoleri; **10**—Mike Jenkins.

MID-SOUTH PRO WRESTLING: Champion—The Atomic Dogg; **1**—Prince Al Farat; **2**—Matt Riviera; **3**—Gary Gram; **4**—Jeff Jett; **5**—Eric Wayne; **6**—Rick Sweetan; **7**—Mark Johnson; **8**—Kid Nikels; **9**—Greg King Jr.; **10**—Frankie Valentine.

NCW/AWA: Champion—The New York Gangster; **1**—Chris Norte; **2**—The Boss; **3**—Jason James; **4**—L.T. Falk; **5**—Bizarro; **6**—Damien Payne; **7**—Buff Bagwell; **8**—Steve O; **9**—Black Ninja; **10**—D'Angelo.

NWA MOUNTAIN STATE: Champion—Jason Kincaid; **1**—The Maestro; **2**—Scotty Rocker; **3**—Kris King; **4**—Frank Parker; **5**—Johnny Blast; **6**—Scotty McKeever; **7**—Billy Lit; **8**—The Spoiler; **9**—Gene Madrid; **10**—Buddy Love.

PRIMAL CONFLICT WRESTLING: Champion—Jimmy Jannetty; **1**—Tommy Hawk; **2**—Brock Singleton; **3**—Bobby Shields; **4**—Shannon Moore; **5**—Hunter Muhammed; **6**—Ramblin' Rich; **7**—Mark Bravura; **8**—Bobby Eaton; **9**—Kermon the German; **10**—Ashton Amherst.

RENEGADE PRO WRETLING: Champion—Tojo Yamamoto Jr.; **1**—Jose Guerrero; **2**—Soul Train; **3**—Diablo; **4**—Danny Ice; **5**—Pretty Boy; **6**—Chivas; **7**—Just Zac; **8**—Rock Star; **9**—Tony Flood; **10**—Davey Boy Sloan.

TEXAS ELITE WRESTLING: Champion—Jack Stevens; **1**—Chance Wyndam; **2**—Chris Preston; **3**—Mikey Malice; **4**—Maxx Lavaro; **5**—Mongoose; **6**—Sean Cordova; **7**—Leslie Payne; **8**—Jason Skyy; **9**—8-Ball; **10**—Pooch.

RING OF HONOR

Champion:
NIGEL McGUINNESS
(C) 220, London, England
1—BRYAN DANIELSON
(1) 185, Aberdeen, WA
2—RODERICK STRONG
(5) 205, Tampa, FL
3—BRENT ALBRIGHT
(6) 202, Othello, WA
4—AUSTIN ARIES
(2) 202, Milwaukee, WI
5—JIMMY JACOBS
(7) 173, Grand Rapids, MI
6—CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI
(9) 232, Schaffhausen, Switzerland
7—GO SHIOZAKI
(4) 220, Tokyo, Japan
8—TYLER BLACK
(3) 210, Davenport, IA
9—JERRY LYNN
(–) 185, Minneapolis, MN
10—NAOMICHI MARUFUJI
(–) 185, Saitama, Japan

NWA

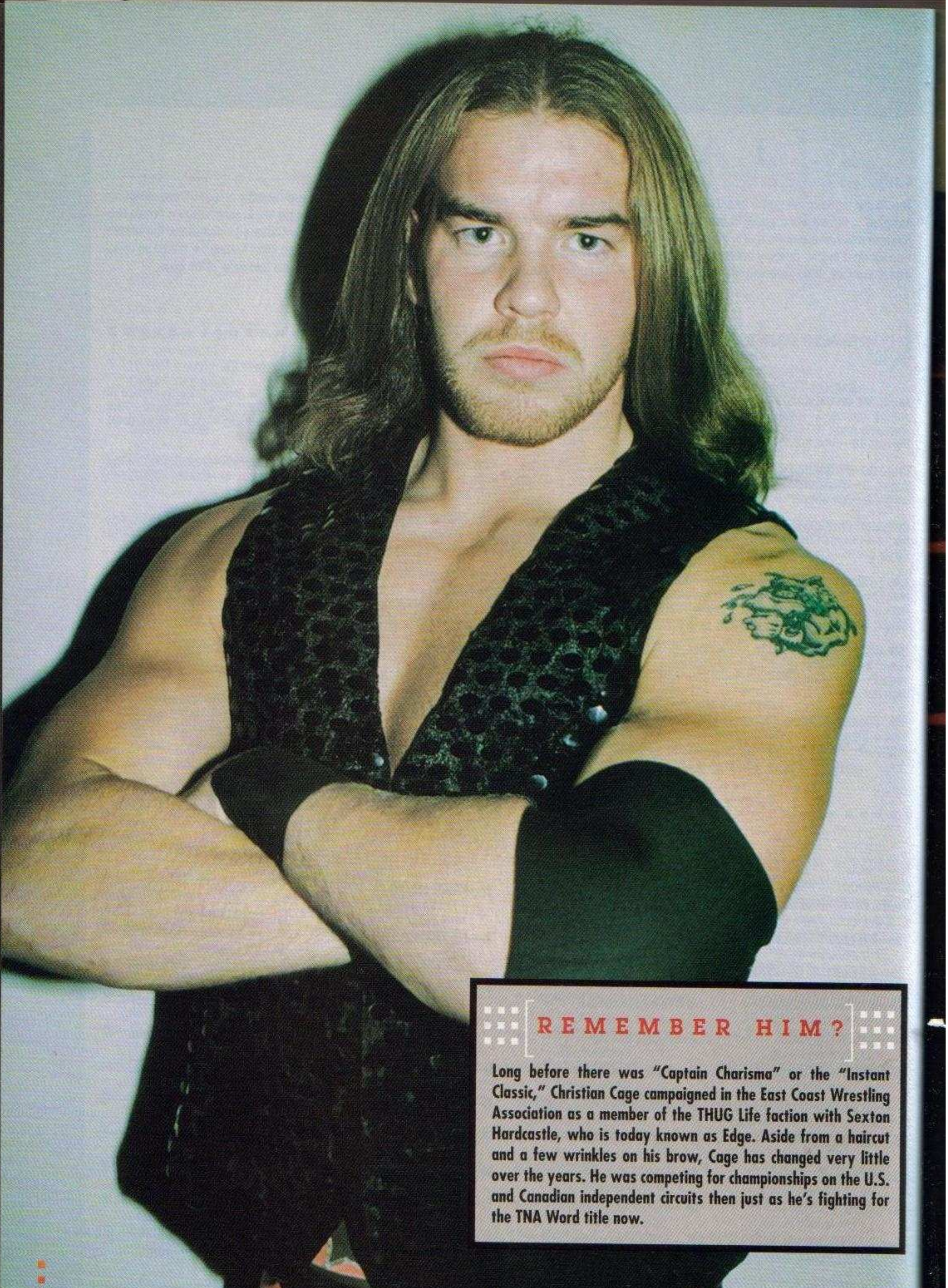
Champion:
ADAM PEARCE
(C) 248, San Diego, CA
1—BRENT ALBRIGHT
(1) 238, Tulsa, OK
2—BLUE DEMON JR.
(2) 216, Mexico City, Mexico
3—MIKE DiBIASE
(4) 220, Amarillo, TX
4—KEIJI MUTO
(3) 245, Yamanashi, Japan
5—ROB CONWAY
(8) 238, New Albany, IN
6—SHINSUKE NAKAMURA
(5) 245, Mineyama, Kyoto, Japan
7—T.J. PERKINS
(6) 210, Kansas City, MO
8—SEAN WALTMAN
(7) 212, Minneapolis, MN
9—CRUSHER HANSEN
(9) 260, Strongville, OH
10—TREVOR MURDOCH
(–) 241, Waxahachie, TX

JAPAN

1—KEIJI MUTO
(1) 245, Yamanashi, Japan
IWGP champion
2—KENSUKE SASAKI
(–) 254, Fukuoka, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion
3—TOGI MAKABE
(–) 243, Sagamihara, Japan
4—SUWAMA
(3) 265, Fujisawa, Japan
AJPW Triple Crown champion
5—SHINSUKE NAKAMURA
(4) 245, Kyoto, Japan
6—HIROYOSHI TENZAN
(–) 254, Kyoto, Japan
7—SATOSHI KOJIMA
(–) 247, Tokyo, Japan
8—TAKESHI MORISHIMA
(2) 320, Tokyo, Japan
9—MASATO TANAKA
(–) 216, Wakayama, Japan
10—YUJI NAGATA
(–) 238, Chiba, Japan

MEXICO

1—CIBERNETICO
(–) 234, Aguascalientes, Mexico
2—VILLANO V
(–) 220, Mexico City, Mexico
3—DR. WAGNER JR.
(2) 215, Mexico City, Mexico
4—CHESSMAN
(–) 231, Villa Nicolas Romero, Mexico
5—ULTIMO GUERRERO
(–) 210, Gomez Palacio, Mexico
6—ATLANTIS
(6) 180, Guadalajara, Mexico
7—NEGRO CASAS
(–) 185, Mexico City, Mexico
8—BLUE PANTHER
(–) 194, Gomez Palacio, Mexico
9—LA PARKA
(–) 216, Hermosillo, Mexico
10—DOS CARAS JR.
(1) 211, San Luis Potosi, Mexico



REMEMBER HIM?

Long before there was "Captain Charisma" or the "Instant Classic," Christian Cage campaigned in the East Coast Wrestling Association as a member of the THUG Life faction with Sexton Hardcastle, who is today known as Edge. Aside from a haircut and a few wrinkles on his brow, Cage has changed very little over the years. He was competing for championships on the U.S. and Canadian independent circuits then just as he's fighting for the TNA Word title now.

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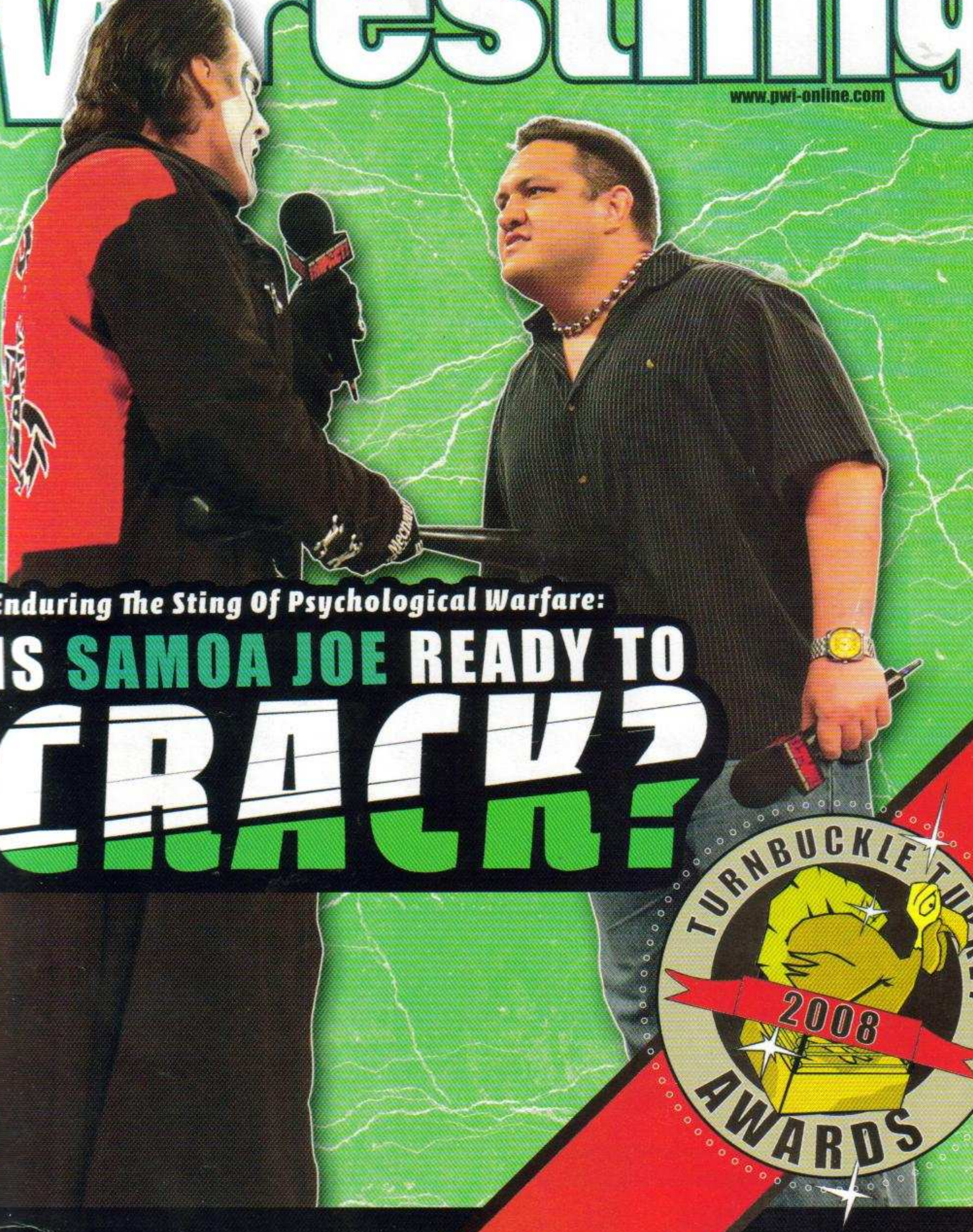


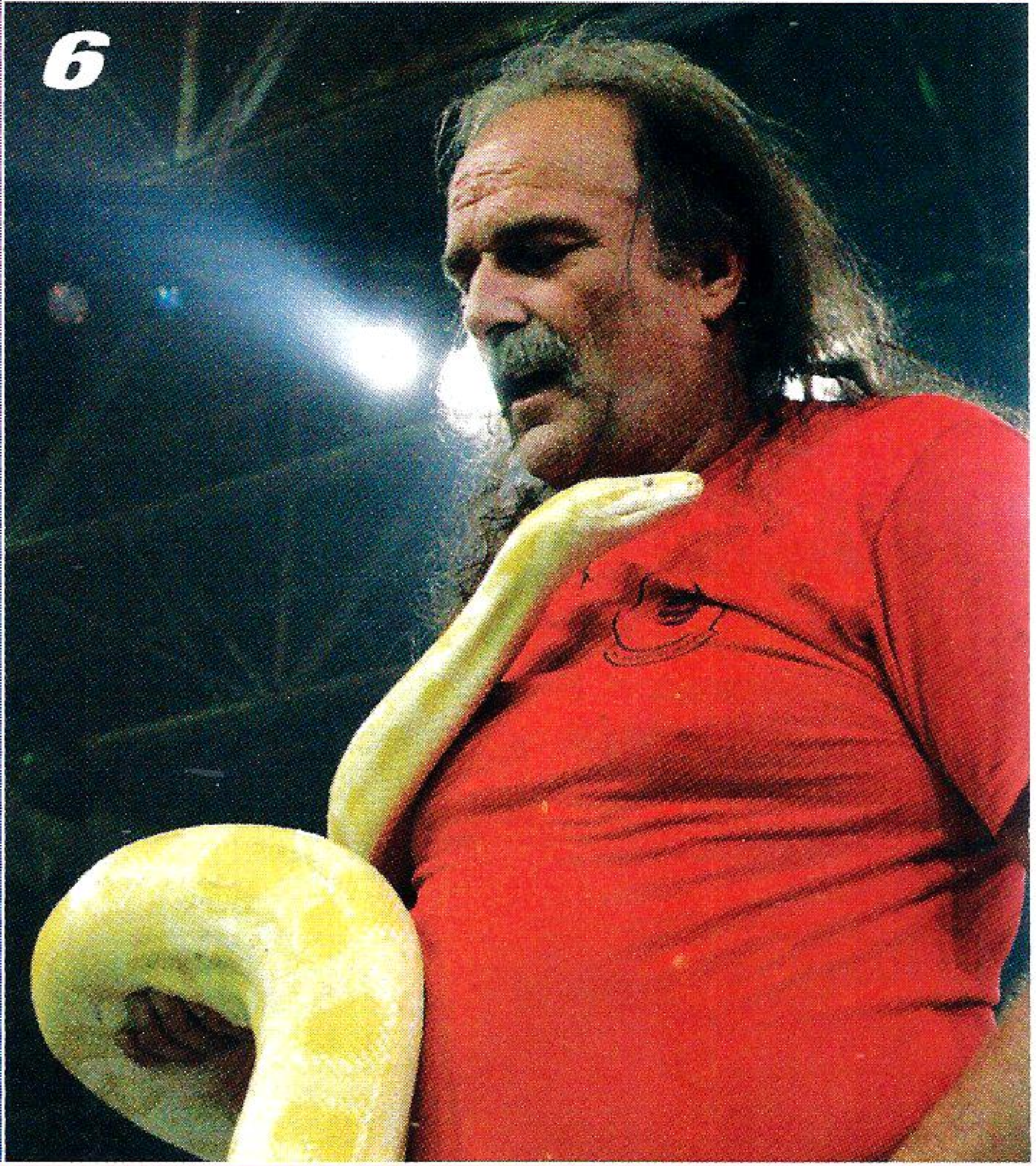
Enduring The Sting Of Psychological Warfare:

IS SAMOA JOE READY TO CRACK?

TURNBUCKLE TURKEY 2008 AWARDS

inside wrestling

THE MAGAZINE THAT RIPS THE LID OFF PRO WRESTLING



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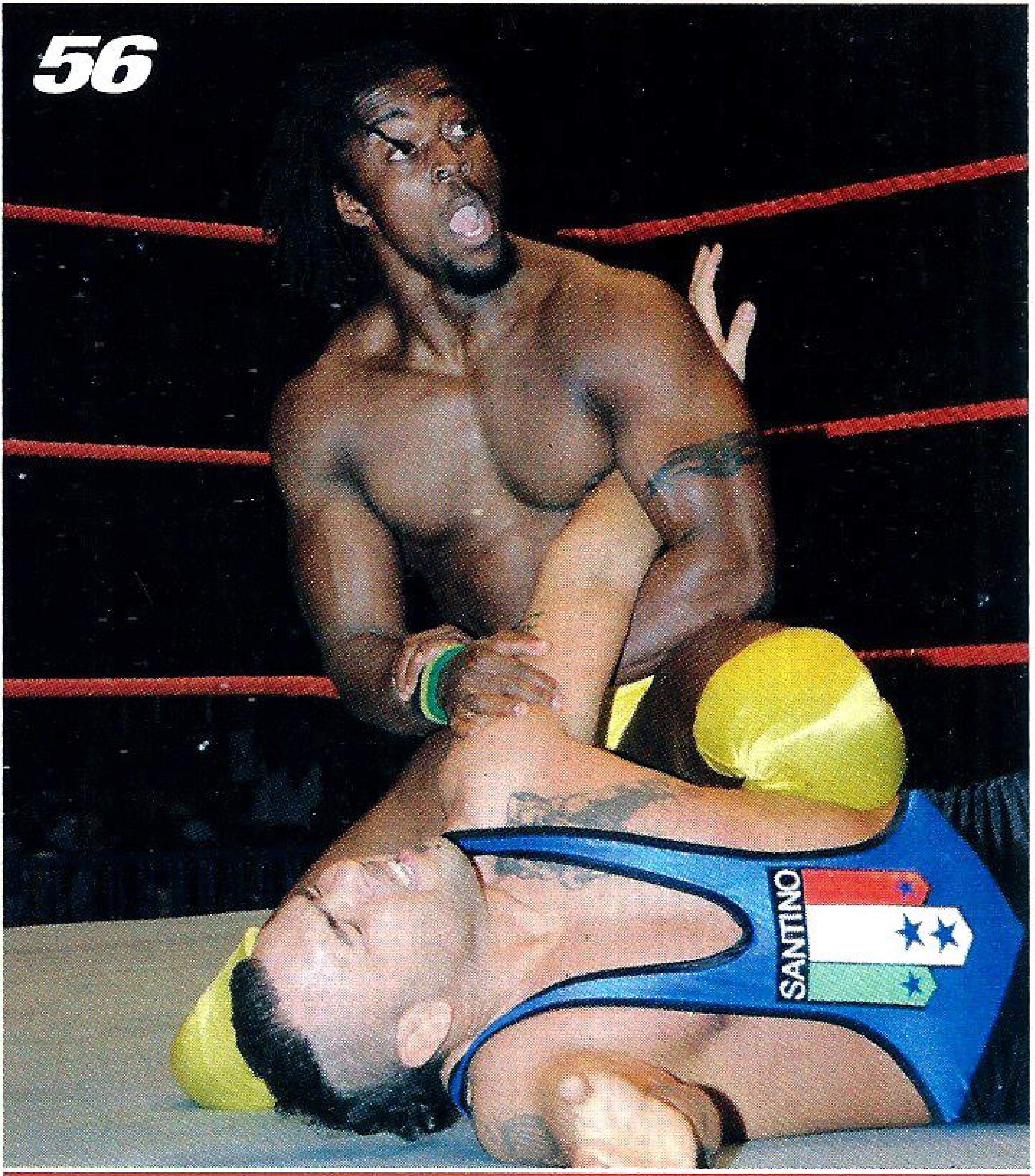

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COVER PHOTO:
Lee South/TNA Wrestling

COVER DESIGN:
Joseph Rogan

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sincerely yours

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Fort Washington, PA 19034
or e-mail letters to
insideletters@yahoo.com

FLY RIGHT, JEFF

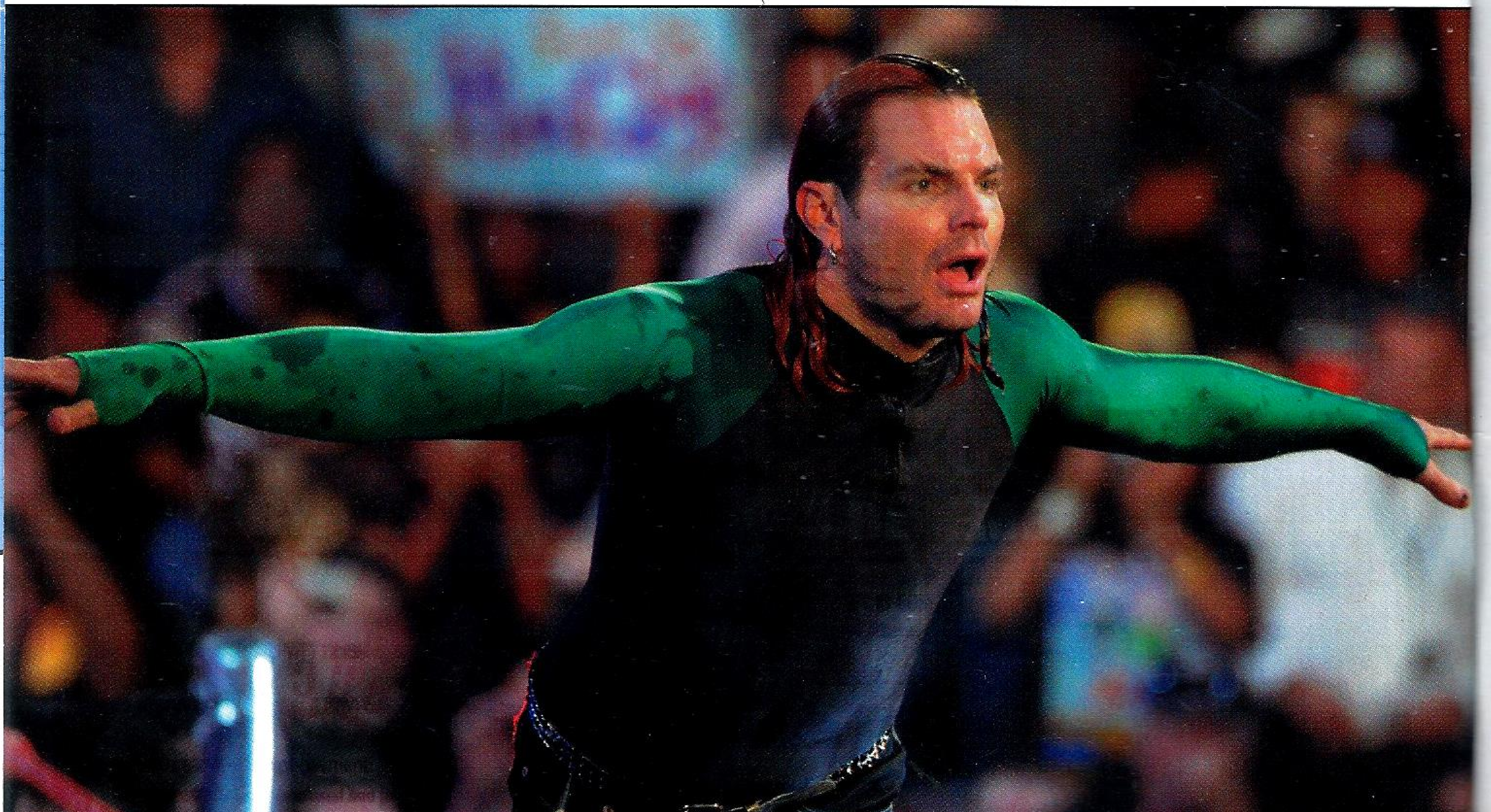
As I was flipping through the pages of *The Tennessean* on its website the other day, as I do every day, I found an interesting article about an intoxicated wrestler who was not allowed to board a flight. As a wrestling fan, my interest was piqued by the possible gossip. That was, however, until I got to the name of the wrestler: Jeff Hardy.

I've always been a fan of the Hardys, especially Jeff. So when he was released by WWE in 2003 and was removed from WrestleMania 24 because of a substance abuse suspension, I hoped he would have learned his lesson. It seems nothing official has been done about this by WWE. A spokesperson for Southwest Airlines said Jeff didn't put up a fight. Hopefully, the third time really is a charm for Jeff.

CINDY KURITA
Chattanooga, TN

JAPANESE SECTION

After taking some time off, I have returned to reading your family of magazines. Honestly, what drew me back in were the interviews with likes of Jim Cornette, Nick Bockwinkel, and Jesse Ventura. To this day, I am still amazed by the dedication of your staff to the



Jeff Hardy is fortunate WWE chose not to discipline him after he was denied access to a Southwest Airlines flight due to intoxication. Reader Cindy Kurita of Chattanooga, Tennessee, hopes Jeff will learn from this incident.

sport of wrestling. I actually many times prefer reading about wrestling in your magazines to watching it!

Recently, I read your article "ROH: 10 Stars You Need To Know" Volume 23, 2008). Personally, I would love to see the same type of section, but with the stars of Japan (NOAH, NJPW, etc.). Especially great would be a spread on *joshi puroresu*—the common name for Japanese female wrestling.

Thanks to everybody for all your hard work!

JAVIER OJST
San Francisco, CA

SWAGGER'S UNSTOPPABLE

Everybody has been waiting for professional wrestling's "Next Big Thing," and I'm here to tell you that it has arrived in ECW. His name is Jack Swagger, and even after just two matches for WWE, I can tell he is going to be a dominant force for years to come.

At 6'4", 290 pounds, Swagger had all the ingredients to put together a Hall of Fame career. Nobody, not even Batista nor Triple-H, will be able to stop him once he gathers some experience at the pro level. All I hope is that Teddy Long and WWE don't screw around with this kid and ruin him. He is a genuine superstar in the making.

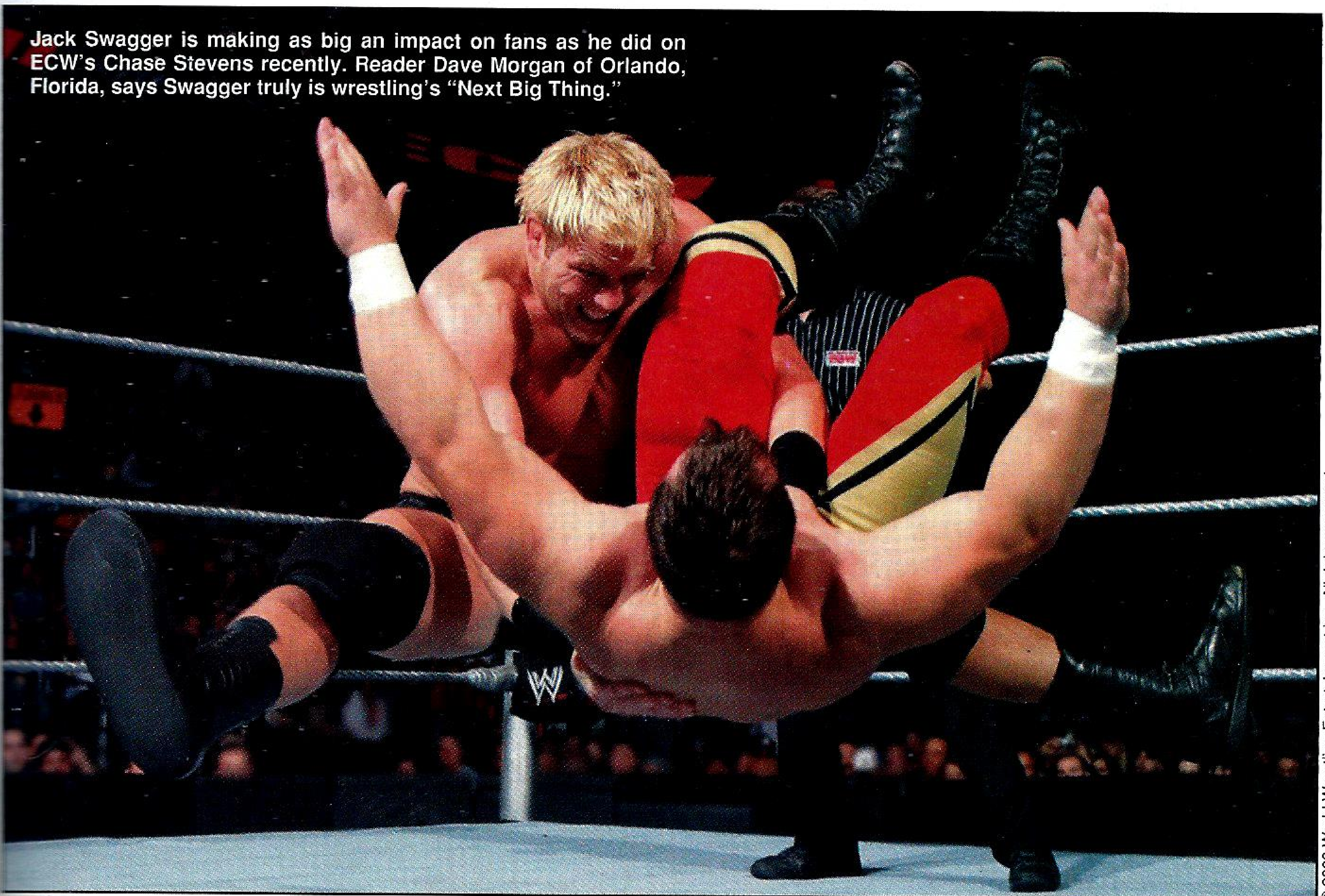
DAVE MORGAN
Orlando, FL

X DIVISION = XCITEMENT

After watching TNA's No Surrender pay-per-view, I have to admit I am changing my view on the X division. I was never a fan of the cruiserweight divisions in WWE or WCW, so I guess I came in with a bit of a bias when TNA announced the X division. But some of these guys are truly awe-inspiring.

Inspired by Petey Williams' match, I took some time and looked up a few videos of him on YouTube.com. Man, is that guy fast! And his finisher, the Canadian destroyer, is probably the coolest move I've ever seen done in a wrestling ring. Hopefully, he will be able to win his title back soon. I think he is a great face for the X division and, possibly, could take it to a whole new level of respectability.

CHARLIE BENSON
Greensborough, AL ☐



Jack Swagger is making as big an impact on fans as he did on ECW's Chase Stevens recently. Reader Dave Morgan of Orlando, Florida, says Swagger truly is wrestling's "Next Big Thing."

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names makin' news

By Harry Burkett

WHAT EVERYONE FEARED would be a third strike against **Jeff Hardy** turned out to be just a foul ball, as the "Charismatic Enigma" came dangerously close to risking his spot on the Smackdown roster because of an incident that occurred on September 17 at the Nashville International Airport.

Accompanied by brother **Matt Hardy** and longtime pal **Gregory Helms**, the former WWE Intercontinental champion was scheduled for a flight from Nashville, Tennessee, to his home state of North Carolina. According to a spokesman with Southwest Airlines, an employee at the gate believed Hardy was intoxicated and did not allow him entry onto the plane. He was escorted from the gate with no further incident.

"He was very cooperative and there was no altercation," the spokesman said. "There was no need to get police."

Hardy was offered another flight for later in the day, but he declined and made other arrangements to get home. WWE officials are not going to take disciplinary action against Hardy, and consider it a non-issue.

The incident occurred at a sensitive time for Hardy, who was slated to face WWE heavyweight champion **Triple-H** at No Mercy. Hardy's well-documented personal issues have always hindered his push, a point driven home by Triple-H in a recent promo. The champion, referring to Hardy's two suspensions resulting from violations of WWE's Wellness Policy, noted that the superstar had "only one strike left."

Will Hardy ever hit a home run in WWE ... or will another dumb stunt send him back to the minor leagues?

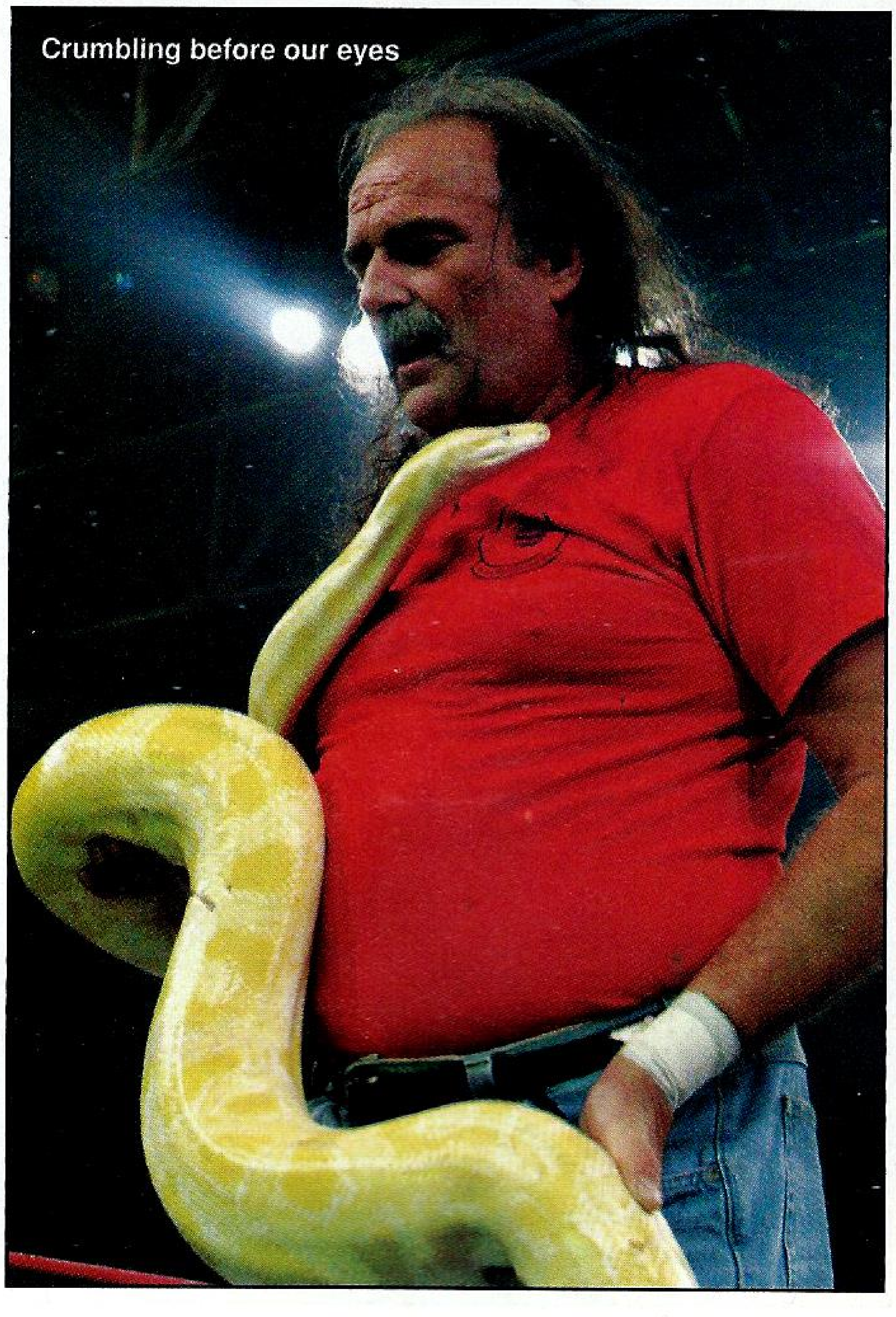
The pathetic downward spiral of **Jake Roberts** continues. Roberts' on-camera meltdown at an indy show on September 12 received more than a quarter-million hits on YouTube. Considering that Roberts' cocaine addiction was featured prominently in **Barry Blaustein**'s *Beyond The Mat* documentary back in 1999, and that Roberts has appeared drunk on pay-per-views and other recorded events, it seemed "The Snake" couldn't slither any lower.

Roberts' performance on September 12 in Cleveland, Ohio, proved otherwise. Twenty seconds into his match against veteran **J.T. Lightning**, a drunken Roberts staggered and collapsed to the mat. Realizing that Roberts was unable to perform, Lightning quickly covered the former WWF and WCW star, but Roberts kicked out. Lightning then made another cover, hooked Roberts' leg securely, and put the wasted legend out of his misery. Lightning grabbed the microphone and castigated Roberts in an expletive-laced tirade.

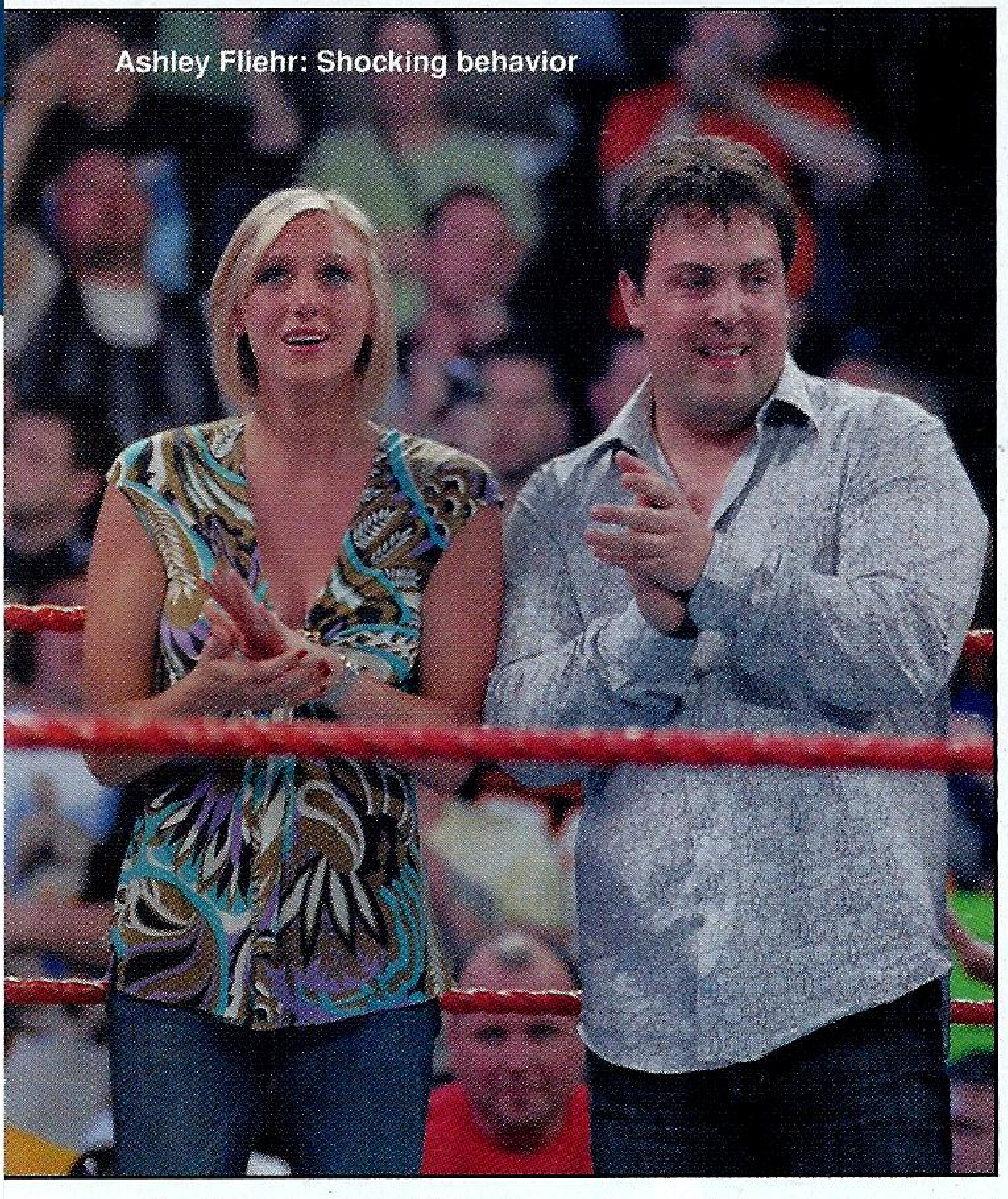
After a furious Lightning made his exit, Roberts continued talking trash with the fans, even exposing himself briefly. Another wrestler hurriedly attacked Roberts, perhaps trying to salvage some sort of angle, but he, too, left in frustration. The scene continued outside, where Roberts argued with Lightning and eventually broke down into tears.

Three days later, Roberts told thesportsinterview.com that he had been drugged, stating, "I can't tell you how scary it is because, right now, I am shaking just thinking about it. I just don't want it to happen to anybody. Whoever did it, I hope to hell what goes around comes around and let God sort it out, because I am not going on a manhunt because I'm scared to even open the door, much less anything else."

Roberts' personal assistant went as far as to say there was an eyewitness who saw someone slip "white powder" into his drink.


Crumbling before our eyes

HIGH-FLYER GROUNDED BY SOUTHWEST


Ashley Fliehr: Shocking behavior

Earlier this year, Roberts underwent drug and alcohol treatment that was paid by WWE.

It's always disturbing to see famous wrestlers—idols to many—engage in lifestyles that spin out of control. Unfortunately, there are signs this is happening to perhaps the most famous wrestler of them all, **"Nature Boy" Ric Flair**.

Flair was involved in a road rage incident back in 2005 and has suffered two failed marriages in just the past few years. The latest Flair family embarrassment occurred on September 5 when police were called to the parking lot of an apartment complex in Charlotte, North Carolina, regarding a scuffle involving Ric, his youngest daughter, **Ashley Fliehr**, and her boyfriend. Ashley allegedly assaulted an officer, and she was brought down with a taser. Flair was bruised and bloody afterward, and his black eye was apparent when he attended a Highspots convention five days later.

Stories of Flair's unstable lifestyle and party appetite became legendary in WWE and, unfortunately, sordid chapters continue to be written since the 16-time world champion's retirement. Flair's longtime friend, **Jim Ross**, felt compelled to address the situation on jrsbbq.com: "The incidents of the past few days have troubled me. Seeing my dear friend with a nasty black eye as a result of a still-somewhat-unexplained incident involving his youngest daughter and, allegedly, her boyfriend. This is not a good deal any way one slices it … I just want the 'Nature Boy' story to have a happy ending."

Hurry, somebody call **Dawn Marie**! Perhaps she could offer some support and counseling for Hardy, Roberts, and Flair as part of her new "Wrestlers Rescue" program. Tired of hearing about retired wrestlers being financially broke and physically broken, Dawn Marie hopes her new organization can help wrestlers long after the spotlight dims.

Dawn was inspired after getting to know a couple of former WWF champions who have hit hard times. She befriended **Superstar Graham**, who went bankrupt while undergoing a liver transplant. She has also witnessed **The Iron Sheik**, who now struggles just to walk, being forced to appear at one indy show after another just to make ends meet.

In an interview with the *Long Island Press*, Dawn said: "We have an epidemic in this industry, and the epidemic is this: You fight like hell to get a career, if you're fortunate enough to be one of the chosen few to have a career. And then as you're on your way down, you filter out and you go back to where you started on the indies to ride out your fame and name, and then 10, 15, 20, 30 years down the road, your body starts feeling the damages that were done during your fame, and you're working past your prime because you have no other way of making money."

The former ECW and Smackdown diva envisions a five-year plan for "Wrestlers Rescue." First, she wants to raise awareness for retired wrestlers still suffering from injuries. Then she hopes to establish a financial advisory service to help active wrestlers plan for their future. Finally, the ultimate goal will be to help active and retired wrestlers purchase healthcare insurance for themselves and their families through a group plan.

Said Dawn, "I would love nothing more than to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with **Dixie Carter** on one side and **Vince McMahon** on the other for this cause."

This new initiative comes at the same time that **Raven**, **Chris Kanyon**, and **Mike Sanders** are suing WWE, claiming the company's long-held policy of classifying its wrestlers as independent contractors is invalid. Their attorney is seeking class-action status, meaning the plaintiffs could include any talent who worked for the company between July 16, 2002, and July 16, 2008.

Raven and the others believe WWE wrestlers are not independent contractors, considering WWE controls everything about its wrestlers' careers, from travel itineraries to what they say in pre-match promos. They insist that WWE wrestlers are actually company employees who are entitled to federal tax, Social Security, and Medicare withholding as well as health insurance, paid sick time, and vacation time.

WWE attorney **Jerry McDevitt** dismissed the independent contractor issue, telling the *Connecticut Law Tribune*, "My sense is that it's been a kind of *en vogue* lawsuit for the class-action bar."

While we're on the subject of the health and well-being of pro wrestlers, it's worth noting that TNA is getting tough with an updated drug policy. In fact, during a recent set of *Impact* tapings, TNA wrestlers were given packets that outline the company's stricter enforcement measures.

Dawn Marie: Looking out for retired wrestlers

NEWS ANALYSIS

RVD REVISITED? Holding my breath and wringing my hands along with thousands of other fans, it seems that we're rooting for Jeff Hardy to succeed in spite of himself. For years, fans lobbied WWE to give Rob Van Dam the push he deserved, and he rewarded all of us by getting arrested for marijuana possession, thereby bringing a premature end to his WWE and ECW title reigns. Don't prove Triple-H right, Jeff.

FADING LEGENDS. An overweight Elvis ripping his britches on stage. Tennis great Jimmy Connors, grunting and lunging toward the net, and dropping to 936th-ranked player in the world. Kane piledriving Pete Rose, who's dressed as the San Diego Chicken. There's nothing sadder than seeing someone who was once perceived as a master of his or her craft unable to do the job anymore. Jake, please stop the spectacle. It's time for Plan B.

FLAIR RETURNING TO THE NWA. Despite some of the bad press Flair has received lately, I'm glad to see him making appearances on the indy circuit, where he can meet his fans up close. The most intriguing of these dates is a stop on the NWA's 60th Anniversary Tour at the RMB Fairgrounds in Robstown, Texas, where he will receive a medal as a member of the Alliance's Hall of Fame. Geez, shouldn't the Hall of Fame be named after Flair?

DAWN MARIE TO THE RESCUE. Between her current job as a real estate closer and being the mother of a two-year-old boy, Dawn Marie certainly has enough to keep her busy. On top of that, she's going to dedicate herself to making life a bit easier for her older comrades. That's a real measure of the heart of the woman. I'm just sorry it's too late to save Al Wilson.

THIS SHEIK IS NOT CHIC. "I don't want to do the same Middle Eastern character that fans are used to seeing," Shawn Daivari told me in an "Introducing" interview for the Volume 1, 2004, issue of *The Wrestler*. In fact, Daivari hoped to transcend the usual Middle Eastern stereotype in the post-9/11 era. Judging by Daivari's latest incarnation, Sheik Abdul Bashir, he's fallen way short of that goal—even if he is the new X division champ.

On a somewhat-related note, **Kurt Angle** was found not guilty of driving under the influence near his home in Moon Township, Pennsylvania. Witnesses claimed Angle was driving his Cadillac Escalade erratically after leaving a local bar. Police officers went to Angle's house, where they administered a sobriety test. Although Angle failed the test, the judge pointed out that the officers hadn't actually seen the Olympian behind the wheel of a vehicle, so he dismissed the case.

However, Angle's luck ran out at No Surrender, held on September 14 in Oshawa, Ontario. Angle, **Christian Cage**, and defending champ **Samoa Joe** were involved in a three-way main event with the TNA World title at stake. With referee **Earl Hebner** incapacitated on the arena floor, Angle had just smacked the side of Cage's head with a steel chair and dropped him with an Olympic slam, and gone on to smash the chair across Joe's back and snare him in an anklelock. TNA founder **Jeff Jarrett**, returning from an 18-month absence following the death of his wife, came out to the ring. Angle confronted Jarrett, who nailed him with a guitar shot. Samoa Joe recovered long enough to execute the muscle buster and score the three-count over Angle to retain his belt.

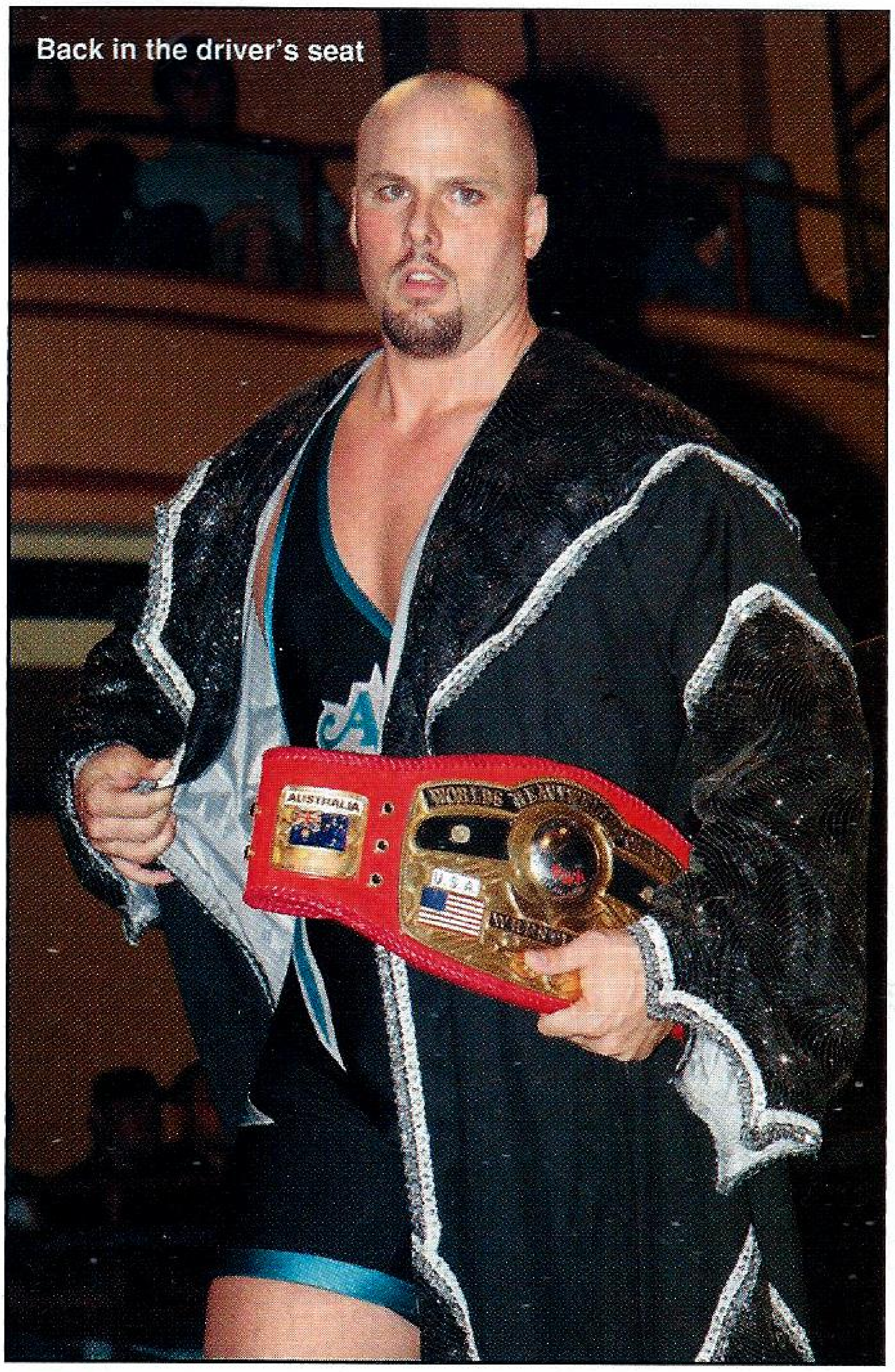
Angle's friend, shoot-fighting competitor **Frank Trigg**, battled **A.J. Styles** in a three-round submission match that blended mixed martial arts and pro wrestling. Although Trigg dominated in that environment, Styles got in a few good shots, including a flying armbar takedown that had Trigg on the defensive. The encounter ended in a no-contest.

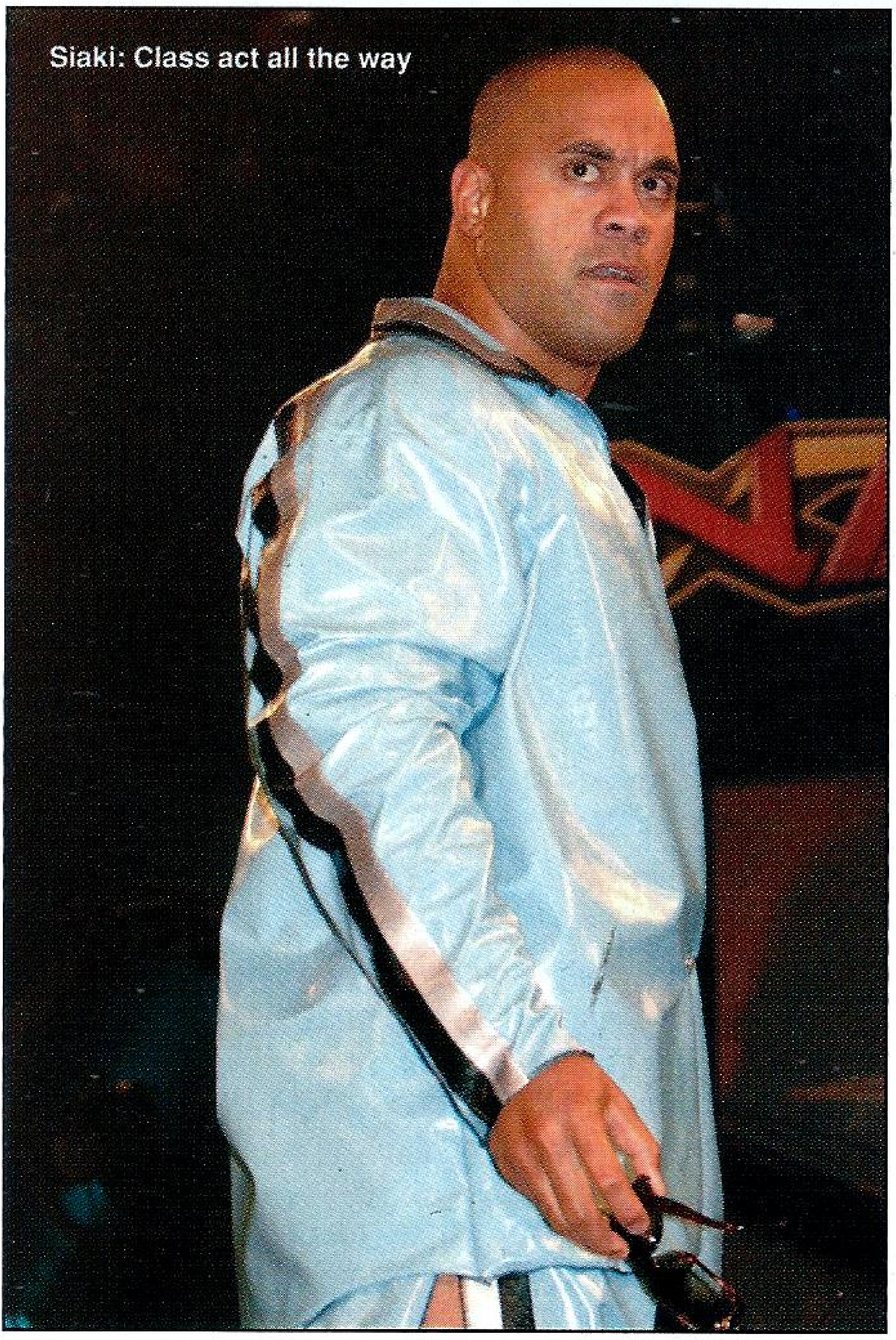
In other bouts at No Surrender, TNA World tag team champions **Robert Roode** & **James Storm** beat **The Latin American Exchange** ... **Sonjay Dutt** pinned **Jay Lethal**, thanks to the betrayal of **So Cal Val** ... Knockouts champion **Taylor Wilde** defeated **Angelina Love** ... **Sheik Abdul Bashir** (formerly known as

Daivari) beat **Consequences Creed** and **Petey Williams** to win the X division title ... **Matt Morgan** & **Abyss** defeated **Team 3-D** ... **Awesome Kong** beat **ODB** ... **Curry Man**, **Shark Boy**, & **Super Eric** defeated **Lance Rock**, **Jimmy Rave**, & **Christy Hemme**.

News from Ring of Honor: **Kevin Steen** and **El Generico** defeated **Tyler Black** and **Jimmy Jacobs** for the ROH tag team title on September 19 in Boston ... **Nigel McGuinness** retained the ROH singles belt in a sensational match against **Roderick Strong** at the same show ... The promotion ran two events in Tokyo, with McGuinness losing to **Bryan Danielson** in a non-title bout on September 13, and McGuinness defeating the very unpopular Jacobs in a title match on September 14. **Adam Pearce** defeated **Brent Albright** to regain the NWA heavyweight title on September 20.

This 'n' that: Maryland Championship Wrestling co-owner **Dan McDevitt** (otherwise known as **Corporal Punishment**), whom fans have embraced in recent years, lashed out at MCW diehards who have criticized his booking style as of late. In a fiery posting on an MCW message board, he told those fans to "go to hell" ... **Dennis Gregory** was stripped of the International Wrestling Cartel heavyweight title for "conduct unbecoming a champion," and a two-month tourney to determine a new champ is underway ... Congratulations to **Sheamus O'Shaunessy**, who defeated **Jake Hager** for the FCW title. The "Irish Curse" used a bicycle kick to the face and a choke-bomb to snag the gold.


Back in the driver's seat


Siaki: Class act all the way

From the More Hogan Hyjinx Dept.: **Hulk Hogan** is spending more money than he's making, no thanks to his soon-to-be ex-wife, **Linda**. According to the *St. Petersburg Times*, Hulk earns "only" $56,708 per month, but spends $104,451—$40,000 of which goes to Linda ... who spends an average of $7,258 on clothes and $1,374 on pet expenses. Meanwhile, Linda's new boyfriend, who is 29 years her junior, looks amazingly like a young Terry Bollea, complete with long blond hair and thinning top straight out of Tampa Bay 1975. And, not too long ago, Hulk admitted to having an affair with daughter **Brooke**'s personal assistant, who bore a striking resemblance to Linda—just with a lot less miles on her. Hogan family news gets weirder and weirder—and **Nick** hasn't even gotten out of jail yet!

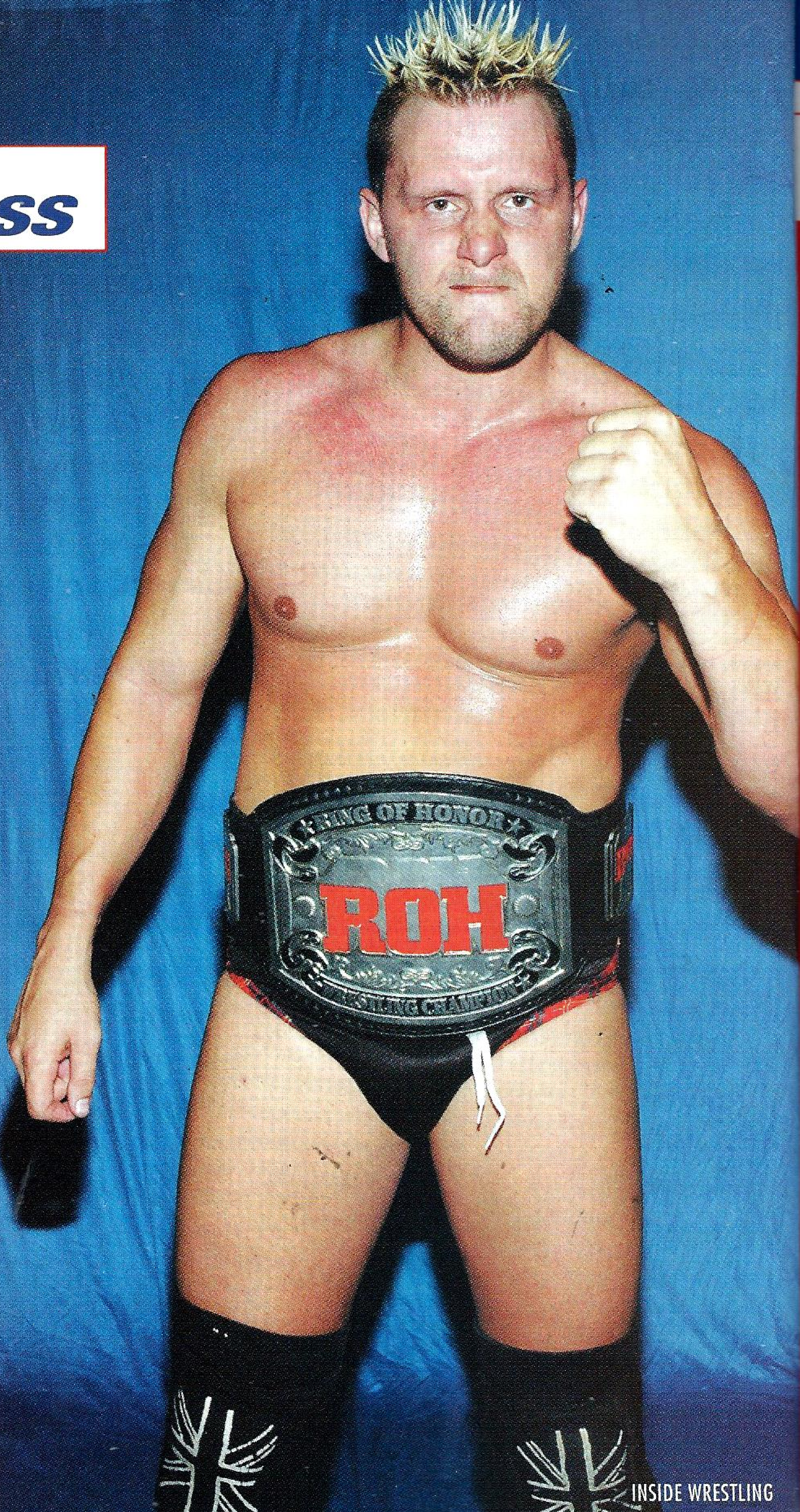
Before we part, I want to mention that **Sonny Siaki** has retired after an eight-year career. The selfless Siaki—who competed in WCW, TNA, and WWE over the years—will be donating one of his kidneys to his brother, **Bernard Siaki**, who has been diagnosed with renal kidney failure. Please keep Sonny and Bernard in your thoughts and prayers.

That's all for now. Save a ringside seat for me. □

data sheet

NIGEL McGUINNESS

HEIGHT: 6'1"
WEIGHT: 220
HOMETOWN: London, England
GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: October 6, 2007—at Ring of Honor's pay-per-view Undeniable, McGuinness defeated Japanese legend Takeshi Morishima to capture his first-ever ROH championship, becoming only the second foreign-born champion in the history of the promotion. McGuinness had previously held the ROH Pure championship before ending Morishima's eight-month title reign.
HE DOES IT SO WELL: McGuinness is a physically gifted agitator with a wealth of experience, and a conscience that rarely interferes with the choices he makes in ROH. He wrestles much larger than his 6'1" frame would suggest and can alter his style to match his opponent's. Still, he's a brawler by nature, which has served him well in an organization that prides itself on pure wrestling.
WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: Slowly but surely, McGuinness is getting to the point where he can put his rabid emotions in check and simply focus on being the man in ROH. Throughout his career, McGuinness has been guided by his emotions. His head needs fixing more so than his game right now.
PET FINISHER: Tower of London
BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: Surviving Austin Aries has been the most difficult challenge to McGuinness since becoming the ROH champion. Aries has a knack for exploiting McGuinness' few weaknesses, and while Nigel has been able to hold on to the title, it could well be that Aries wears him down over the long haul.
OUTLOOK: Nothing is a lock in ROH, primarily due to the array of talent and available challengers pursuing McGuinness. But, a savvy veteran of the promotion, McGuinness should stay on top as long as he stays healthy and keeps his attitude in check.
QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "The guy's insane, but that's what the fans here enjoy. He's as tough a fighter as he is a knowledgeable wrestler. I can honestly say I didn't enjoy a minute of our fight."
—Adam Pearce



data sheet

VLADIMIR KOZLOV

HEIGHT: 6'8"
WEIGHT: 300
HOMETOWN: Moscow, Russia

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: July 28, 2007—Kozlov's greatest career moment thus far may also be considered his strangest. He defeated then-OVW heavyweight champion Paul Birchall and promptly handed the title over to Mike Kruel as part of a pre-arranged deal between the two. Kozlov's reign of less than one full day is tied for the quickest in OVW history.

HE DOES IT SO WELL: When a wrestler is credited with "using his head" in a match, generally it's in reference to solid ring sense and the ability to make quick adjustments. However, when Kozlov uses his head in a match, it's to be taken literally. The man has made the long-forgotten headbutt an art form. He controls and intimidates opponents with his size and terrifying demeanor before destroying them with a vintage move.

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: Kozlov essentially defines the WWE standard of a giant with little pure wrestling ability, but immeasurable strength. He may enjoy some modicum of success in WWE with that formula, but without developing a ring style, he may not have any real staying power in the big brand. Further, his mike skills—while loud and intimidating—sorely lack the reaction they are intended to evoke.

PET FINISHER: Battering ram

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: Kozlov truly hasn't been tested during his time in either OVW or WWE, struggling momentarily in matches, but eventually getting the better of nearly all his opponents. As of the time this issue went to press, Kozlov was enjoying an undefeated streak as part of the Smackdown brand, and the only test he had faced was finding adequate competition to satiate his aggression.

OUTLOOK: One has to imagine that Kozlov will roll through 2008 in easy fashion, but that doesn't mean 2009 won't prove to be much tougher. Kozlov's resume is being built through a series of victories over grossly overmatched competitors. As opportunities present themselves, Kozlov will need to stretch a bit if he is to be taken seriously.

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "To see this man up-close is quite an intimidating proposition. While all the tools aren't there just yet, this massive specimen has size and aggression, and those are thing you can't teach."
—Jim Ross

on the road

With Dave Lenker

THE MOST FAMOUS guitar in the game is back, and the Impact Zone in Orlando, Florida, is amped up over it. And why not ... I suppose. The buildup to Jeff Jarrett's full-time return was handled extremely well by TNA. But, forgive me if I have my doubts about the ultimate payoff.

The same crowd only a few years ago memorably showed its disgust for Public Enemy Number One Jeff Jarrett by pantomiming a humorous little routine in which they urged Jarrett to put on his coat, put on his hat, and leave. As in just go, don't ask questions, and don't come back anytime soon. It was a go-away reaction as opposed to the we-can't-wait-to-see-you-get-your-tail-kicked reaction all the great heels elicit. It was never clear whether Jarrett really understood that.

To be fair, it was not the entire Impact Zone crowd that pulled that stunt, and we probably made too much of that whole incident anyway. The most vocal fans, whether their voices were heard inside Universal Studios in Orlando or in a more figurative way on the Internet, hated Jarrett the most. That noted, his decision to push himself so hard in TNA, a company he co-founded with his father and still has a part in running on a day-to-day basis, was a big problem for a few years.

Then, for the worst possible reason, he did go away. And he didn't come back anytime soon. His beautiful wife, Jill, died of breast cancer on May 23, 2007, and Jeff left to mourn her and take care of their three daughters.

The one-year-plus hiatus—during which he did make an occasional appearance ended up being longer than I expected. Now he is finally back, and as long as he thinks and his family thinks it's the right time, then it is, indeed, the right time. Wrestling, like any job, can be therapeutic during times of such intense heartache. All that hate that fans had for Jarrett has turned into love, as we all surely knew it would.

Now we all just have to figure out where this thing goes from here. It's not so easy.

It wouldn't take a top Hollywood screenwriter to map out the basic story that will likely start to unfold soon enough. Don't forget, however, that you have Vince Russo sitting in on those creative sessions. If it had been Russo who was charged with writing the screenplay for *Titanic*, he'd probably question whether having the mighty vessel hit an iceberg was too obvious an ending. Maybe he'd have had it revealed that Kate Winslet's character sabotaged the maiden voyage so as to double-cross Leonardo DiCaprio's character, with whom she had supposedly fallen in love. *Yeah, that's it. They'll never see that coming.*

Fear not, this isn't a Russo-bashing hatefest I've started. Just keep in mind that an

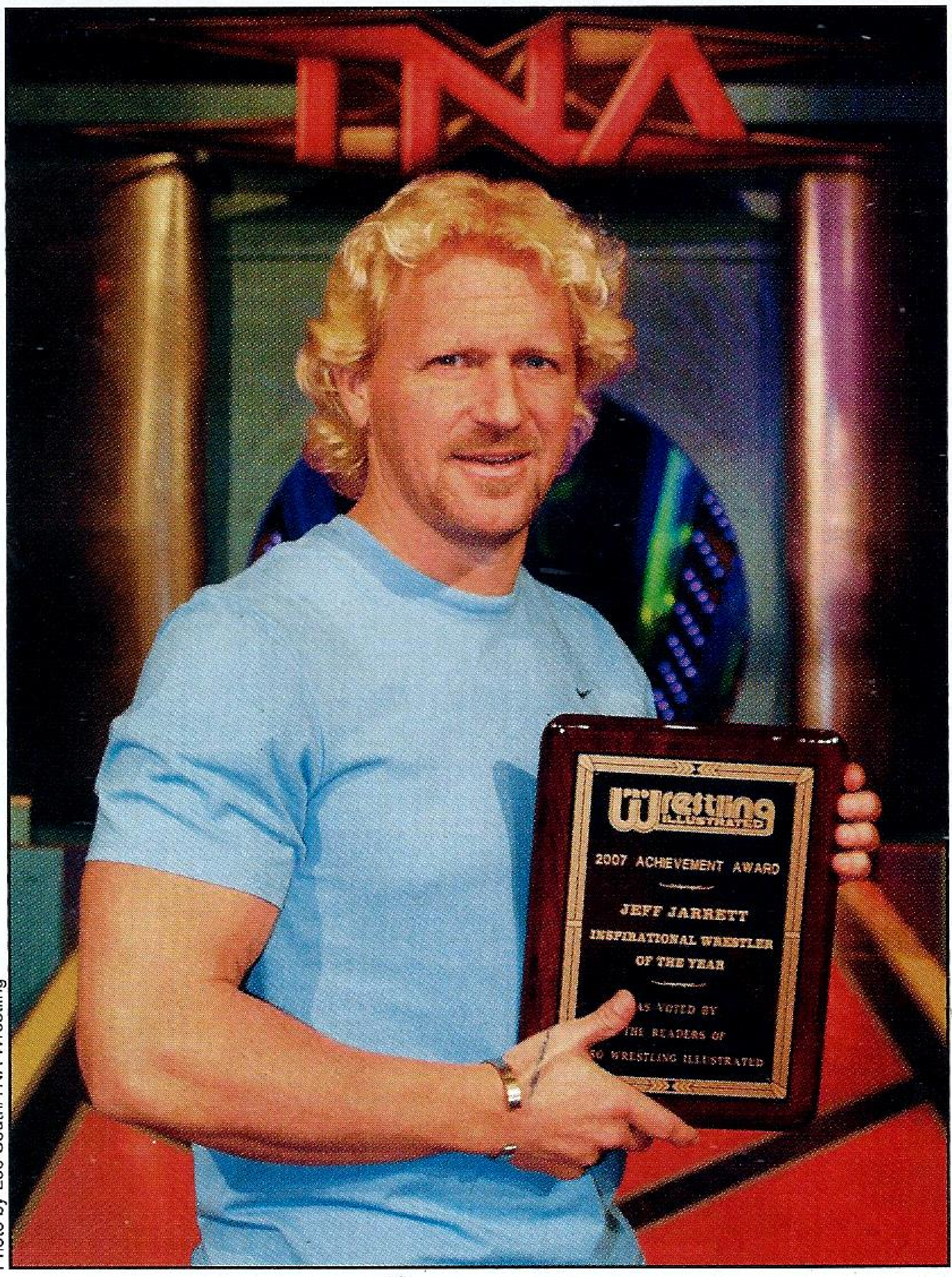

TNA
Wrestling Illustrated
2007 ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
JEFF JARRETT
INSPIRATIONAL WRESTLER OF THE YEAR
AS VOTED BY THE READERS OF PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Jeff Jarrett was voted Inspirational Wrestler of the Year by the readers of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* for the manner in which he carried himself during the most difficult period in his life. Senior Writer Dave Lenker is fearful that Jarrett's personal tragedy will become part of a wrestling storyline.

Rey Mysterio and Eddy Guerrero were real-life amigos, but Lenker feels Rey's World title reign lost some luster when he linked it to Eddy's untimely death.

eventual swerve to end Jarrett's love-in with the fans could be coming. We might not get the storybook ending. But whichever way this turns out, it might end up hurting TNA.

I can certainly envision the swarm of emotion engulfing Jarrett and the fans as maybe he drops to his knees, tears flowing, and cradles the TNA World championship belt in his arms at the end of some future pay-per-view. Yet there is something that feels a little uncomfortable to me about riding the emotion of a real-life tragedy to a big win in a pro wrestling match. I felt that way when Rey Mysterio Jr. "did it for Eddy" as he defeated reigning World champion Kurt Angle and Randy Orton for the title in a three-way match at WrestleMania 22. There's no question WWE exploited Eddy Guerrero's death five months earlier in that case. Some will argue that it continues to do so with the continued presence of his widow, Vickie, now one of the most hated people on the WWE roster.

At 15 years old, and still a relatively new fan of wrestling, I felt it (albeit to a lesser extent then) when Kerry Von Erich won the NWA World championship from Ric Flair in tribute to his recently deceased brother David in front of a huge and emotional crowd at Texas Stadium nearly a quarter-century ago. If Jarrett ends up winning the TNA World title in the next half-year or so, we'll all have to decide whether it will have constituted exploitation of Jill Jarrett's death.

Either way, if it happens, we'll still have Jarrett at the top of TNA. We'll be back to something most of us not named Jeff Jarrett or Dixie Carter were so against for so long. We'll still have a wrestler with a less-than-dynamic style, a wrestler whose best matches are mostly behind him on top of a roster full of wrestlers with the potential to do big things for many years to come.

Back now—in a roundabout way—to a possible Russo-like swerve. Even when the predictable ending is the best ending for all involved (and for the bottom line), we don't always get it in wrestling anymore. There's always a temptation to outsmart everyone. That might lead us down a road on which Jarrett would be left—in shocking fashion—coming out and railing against those who suddenly started supporting him, reminding them about how passionately they despised him in years past. That might be tough to accomplish without it at least looking like exploitation of Jill's death, regardless of whether or not that was the intention.

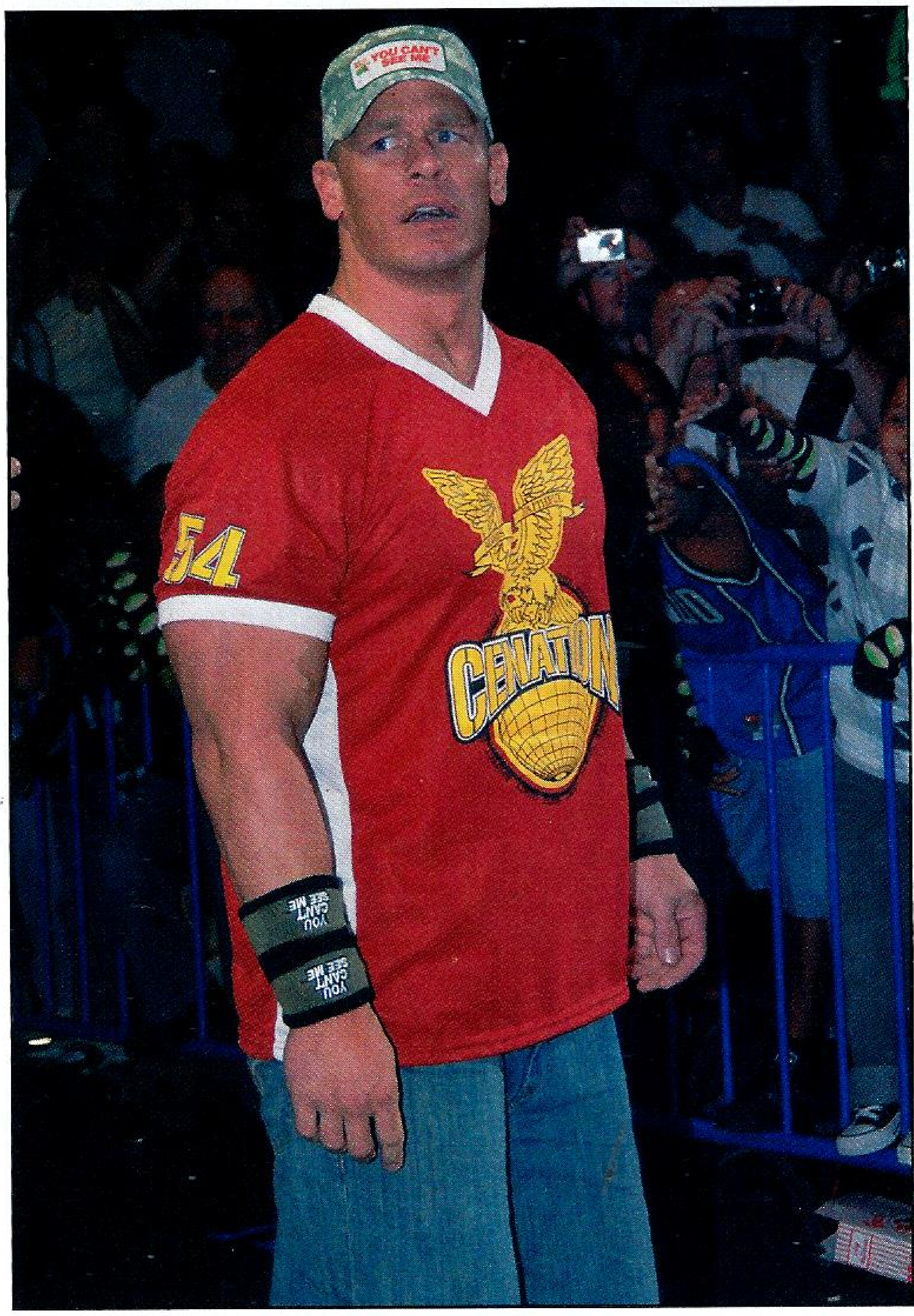
Perhaps you'll accuse me of overthinking Jeff Jarrett's return. It's hard to tell at this juncture. A TNA World title triumph and a short championship reign might work nicely. I don't really know. I don't have the perfect scenario to present. However, I very much hope that Jarrett and the others with stroke in TNA aren't guilty of overthinking or, maybe even worse, underthinking things this time. There's a lot more riding on this comeback than they might realize.

the insider

By Brandi Mankiewicz

OH, BOO HOO. I can hear you fans crying all the way up here in the mountains. Your beloved John Cena hurt his poor little neck. *Awwwwww.* For those of you who don't know, Cena underwent surgery in late-August to remove a piece of herniated disk from his spinal cord, which he suffered during his match with Batista at SummerSlam. Tricky surgery that was absolutely needed, but it's not the end of his career. It's not like they fused his neck vertebrae or anything. In hindsight, I should have slipped the surgeon some extra cash to have Cena's jawbone fused tightly to his skull.

In honor of Cena's cervical restraint (or neck brace for you morons reading this only because there is an accompanying photo of Cena), I'd just like to offer him some words of encouragement by showing him that it is possible to bounce back from neck surgery and wrestle again. Even though he is lacking as a wrestler, Cena is now in good company since there are quite a lot of wrestlers who have injured their necks. Not all of them retired afterward, either. Here's the best of them:



John Cena has no need to look so worried about his future. The three-time World champion was seen backstage at a Smackdown taping in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at the Mellon Arena the day of his surgery. Cena, who more than likely will return to the ring, joins a long list of wrestlers who have suffered neck injuries, only to return to the ring and continue their career.

Andy Kaufman: Back in 1982, Jerry "The King" Lawler wasn't the puppy pandering microphone jockey that you see on Raw every week. Instead, he was the main babyface in Memphis, Tennessee. To prove his superiority in the ring, he chose to callously beat down actor and comedian Andy Kaufman, injuring his neck. The Kaufman-Lawler feud made national headlines for a while. Kaufman's neck would heal and he would eventually continue his acting career. If you care to know the whole story, I suggest watching *Man On The Moon.*

Maybe that doesn't qualify as a tale with a happy ending, so how about this one:

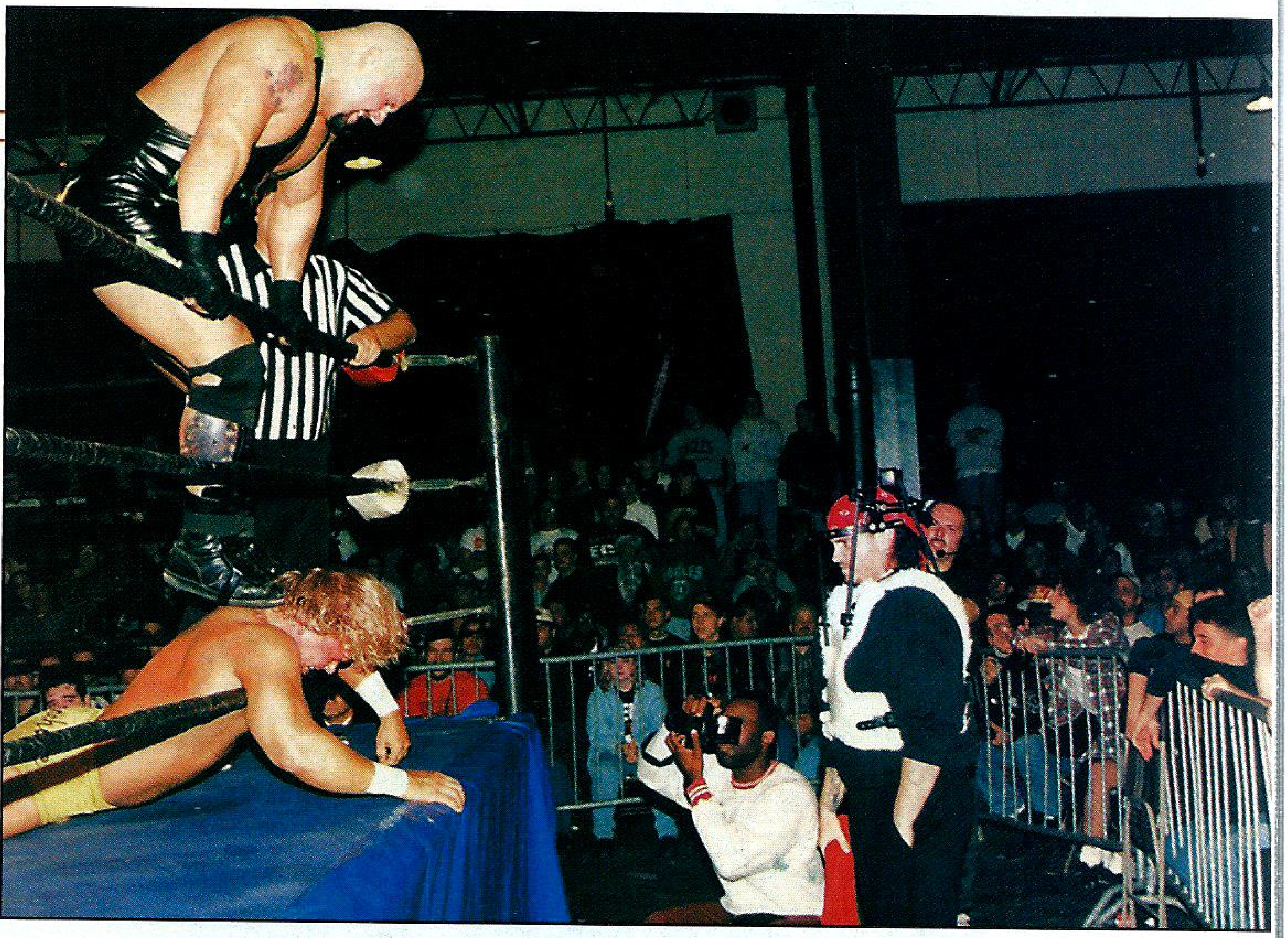
Beulah McGillicutty: For those of you who don't remember wrestling before The Rock, Beulah was the seemingly normal chick in the original ECW. At times, she was the cleanest thing in that scummy building known as the ECW Arena. That's saying a lot since she's done some naughty movies and pictorials—but, back to her neck. In a nutshell, in 1998 Beulah pissed off the Dudley Boyz—which isn't hard to do if you have ovaries—and they retaliated. One Dudley death drop later and Beulah's slender neck was crunched. This was horrifying when it happened, since it was taboo to beat on women back then. Beulah would quietly leave wrestling with a bottle of aspirin. On the upside, she ended up marrying Tommy Dreamer. Not bad for a former *Penthouse* Pet.

Okay, since I doubt Cena's going to pose nude and then marry Tommy Dreamer, that one may not be a good example. How about this one:

Stevie Richards: Another typical night in ECW, another broken neck. Richards injured his neck during a "Fatal Four-Way" match against

Terry Funk, The Sandman, and Raven back in May 1997. The worst part is that Richards had to endure numerous surgeries to fix it.

Yeah, Stevie did go on to have a tremendously mediocre career, but WWE ultimately did dump him. I'm sure I can think of a good one, don't worry. How about:


Pit Bull #1 looks on as Pit Bull #2 takes on Shane Douglas, the man who put #1 in his neck brace. Just a bit of satisfaction had to flow through Pit Bull #1, but it wouldn't last long as Douglas would win the match and take the rest of his anger out on Pit Bull #1.

Pit Bull #1 (Gary Wolfe): Shane Douglas really did a number on Gary Wolfe that July night in 1996. I'm sure Shane didn't mean to neuter this Pit Bull quite like that, but hey, Douglas went on to use it to his advantage just as any truly great heel would. The only thing that makes this example cool is that there are pictures in the *Inside Wrestling* archive of Wolfe in his halo, complete with screws that pierce his head.

Maybe this example will make Cena feel better:

Sabu: Looking back, it's a wonder that ECW had a roster—even if they were all nuts. The craziest of the lot was Sabu, the nephew of the notorious Sheik. He was poised to face a highly respected wrestler named Chris Benoit. Fresh from winning the 1994 Super J cup as Wild Pegasus and the Super Juniors Tournament, Benoit decided to bide his time away from Japan by competing in—you guessed it—ECW. He faced the wildly unpredictable Sabu at November To Remember. Unfortunately, the most unpredictable part was Sabu's boo boo. Well, Benoit tried to toss Sabu up for a high backdrop and Sabu tried to use his cat-like reflexes to land on his feet. Unfortunately, he miscalculated and landed on his head. Sabu gained his first of two broken necks and Benoit gained a new nickname: "The Canadian Crippler." Sabu would continue to fight with the broken neck, although he almost died from an infection. We all know what happened to Benoit. Here's one with a little better ending:

Steve Austin: You remember him. "Stone-Cold" was your favorite before John Cena stepped up. I'm sure Owen Hart didn't mean to botch that piledriver at SummerSlam 1997, causing Austin to be briefly paralyzed, but Austin would miraculously go on to win the Intercontinental title in that match. The "Texas Rattlesnake" would need surgery to repair the damage and had to forfeit his title as a result, but he got his revenge at Survivor Series 1997, beating Hart for the title once again.

This one is just for Stu Saks, our fearless leader:

Bruno Sammartino: For those of you older than 20, you may remember the name Stan Hansen. If you're Liz Hunter, you get chills down your spine when you hear that name. If you're Bruno Sammartino, you check to see if your spine is still sending the correct nerve impulses down to your toes. Back on April 26, 1976—when I was four—Bruno faced off against Hansen in Madison Square Garden. Now, kiddies, this is important: If you think a bodyslam is an easy thing to take, think again. Hansen broke Sammartino's back with an improperly executed one. Bruno spent some time in traction and at home recovering, but did return to exact his revenge against Hansen in June of the same year at Shea Stadium. Bruno didn't exactly get a proper win since it was a countout victory when Hansen high-tailed it from the squared circle, but it was a win nonetheless.

I know there are more neck injuries that I can recount for you, but I'm sure this should be enough to help entice your favorite buffoon to get back in the ring. Don't make me bring up the name Magnum T.A., people!

Thankfully for now, though, John Cena will live up to his tag line of "You can't see me!" I'll enjoy the break. ☐

capsule profile

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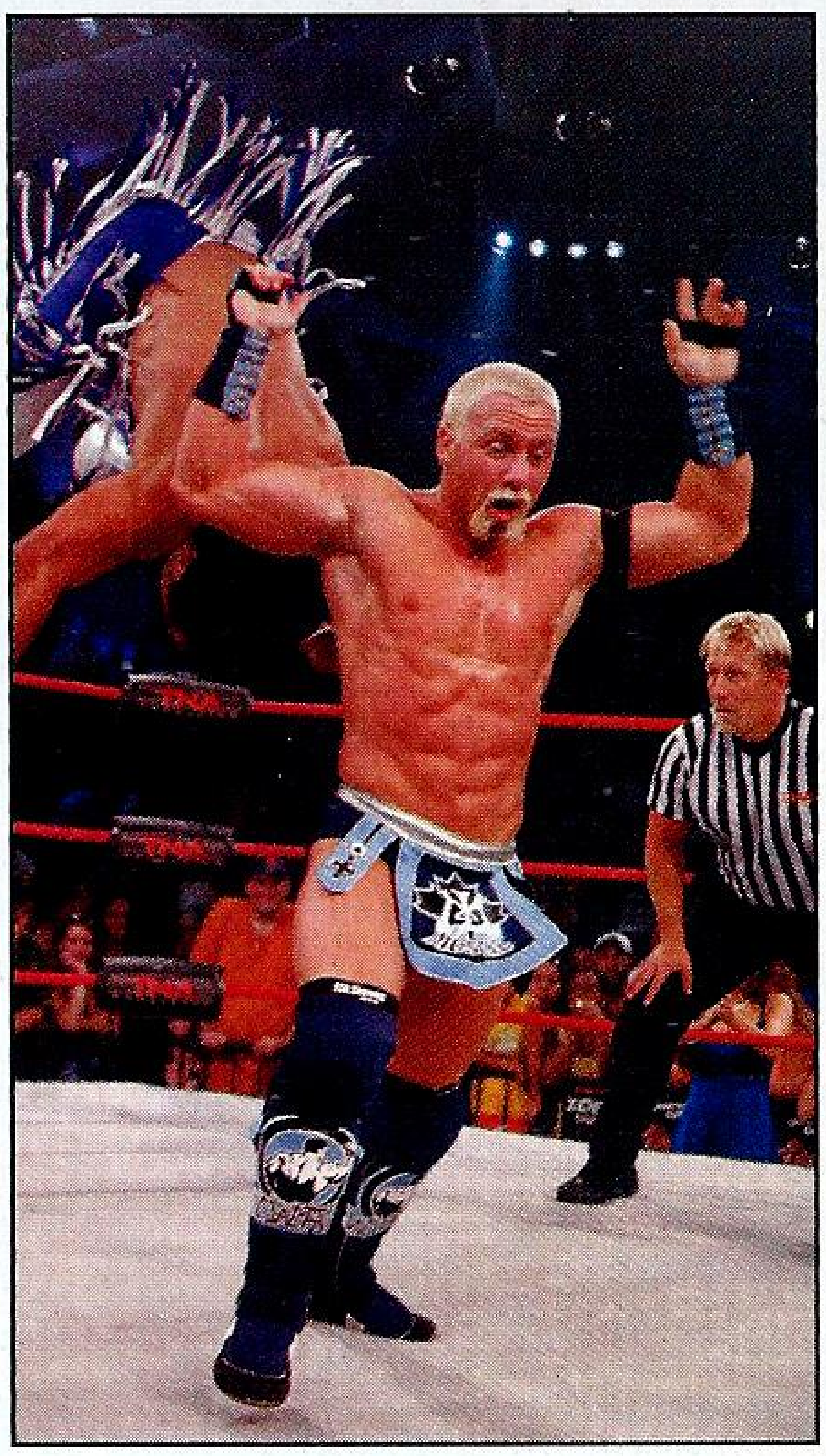
PETEY WILLIAMS

YET ANOTHER SUCCESS story from the wrestling factory that is Canada ... Began professional training under Scott D'Amore at the latter's Can-Am Wrestling School in Windsor, Ontario ... Trained alongside future TNA opponent Chris Sabin ... Made his professional debut for D'Amore's Border City Wrestling in 2002 ... Teamed with A1 in a tag match loss to Bret Nikita and Chris Valentino ... Recorded his first professional singles victory over Hacker in September 2002 ... Bounced around the Canadian and U.S. independent circuits for more than four years ... Gained fame through appearances with Canada's Blood, Sweat, and Ears, as well as Pro Wrestling Guerilla in the California ... Made his first of many appearances with TNA in February 2004 ... Substituted for the recently released Teddy Hart as the captain of Team Canada in the 2004 "World X Cup" tournament ... Turmoil was too much for the team to overcome ... Team Canada lost to both Team Mexico and Team U.S.A. in the tournament ... Exacted some revenge on Hart by teaming with Jack Evans to defeat him in an "Aerial Assault" match for Philadelphia-based promotion Combat Zone Wrestling in March 2004 ... Made sporadic appearances with the promotion over the remainder of the year ... Began appearing more regularly with TNA while still fulfilling other independent obligations ... Won his first singles championship—IWA: Mid-South heavyweight title—in May 2004 ... Held the gold for four months and picked up other titles in the meantime ... Captured his first TNA X division championship in August 2004 in a 22-man gauntlet match ... Warded off challenges by longtime foes A.J. Styles and Sabin, before falling to "The Phenomenal One" in January 2005 ... Chased and failed to capture NWA tag team championship gold throughout much of 2005 ... Made a rare appearance for Ring of Honor in June 2005 ... Was the surprise opponent for ROH alum A.J. Styles ... Could not take down the returning hero ... Along with the rest of Team Canada, joined forces with the notorious faction, Planet Jarrett, in late-2005 ... Once again captained Team Canada in the 2006 version of the World X Cup ... Enjoyed much more success than his first stint as the group's leader ... Salvaged a points tie with Team U.S.A. by winning a gauntlet match at TNA's Sacrifice pay-per-view ... Lost the tiebreaker match against Sabin on *Impact* four nights later ... Going from bad to worse, Team Canada was officially disbanded by TNA Management Director Jim Cornette ... On his own once again, Williams set his sights on the X division title ... In the process, he briefly became a fan favorite ... Aligned with the equally reformed America's Most Wanted during their feud with the Latin American Exchange ... Moved on to a feud with former compatriot Robert Roode ... Lost to Roode at Lockdown ... Appeared only sparingly on TNA programming over the following months ... Gained a greater interest in bodybuilding and integrated it into his TNA appearances ... Began referring to himself as "Maple Leaf Muscle" ... Won a guaranteed TNA World title shot at Turning Point ... Ended up losing that shot to Scott Steiner, but was rewarded with a guaranteed X division championship match ... Formed a partnership with Steiner ... Was rigorously initiated into Steiner's good graces through a series of unsavory and humiliating tasks ... Captured the X division strap for a second time in April 2007 by cashing in his title shot and defeating a battered Jay Lethal ... His reward was being made over to resemble a smaller version of Steiner ... Added yet another nickname, "Little Petey Pump," to his already expansive list ... Suffered a serious eye injury in summer 2008 that kept him out of action for a while ... Did not forfeit the title while recovering ... Made numerous successful title defenses later that summer ... Retained the X division title by defeating upstart Consequences Creed at Hard Justice ... Forged an unlikely, and tenuous, alliance with Sheik Abdul Bashir in early-fall 2008. ☐



What Petey Williams lacks in height, he makes up for in strength. The 5'7", 235-pound, densely muscled powerhouse is a serious threat to TNA X division and World title contenders alike.

PETEY WILLIAMS

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whatever happened to...

By Mike Lano

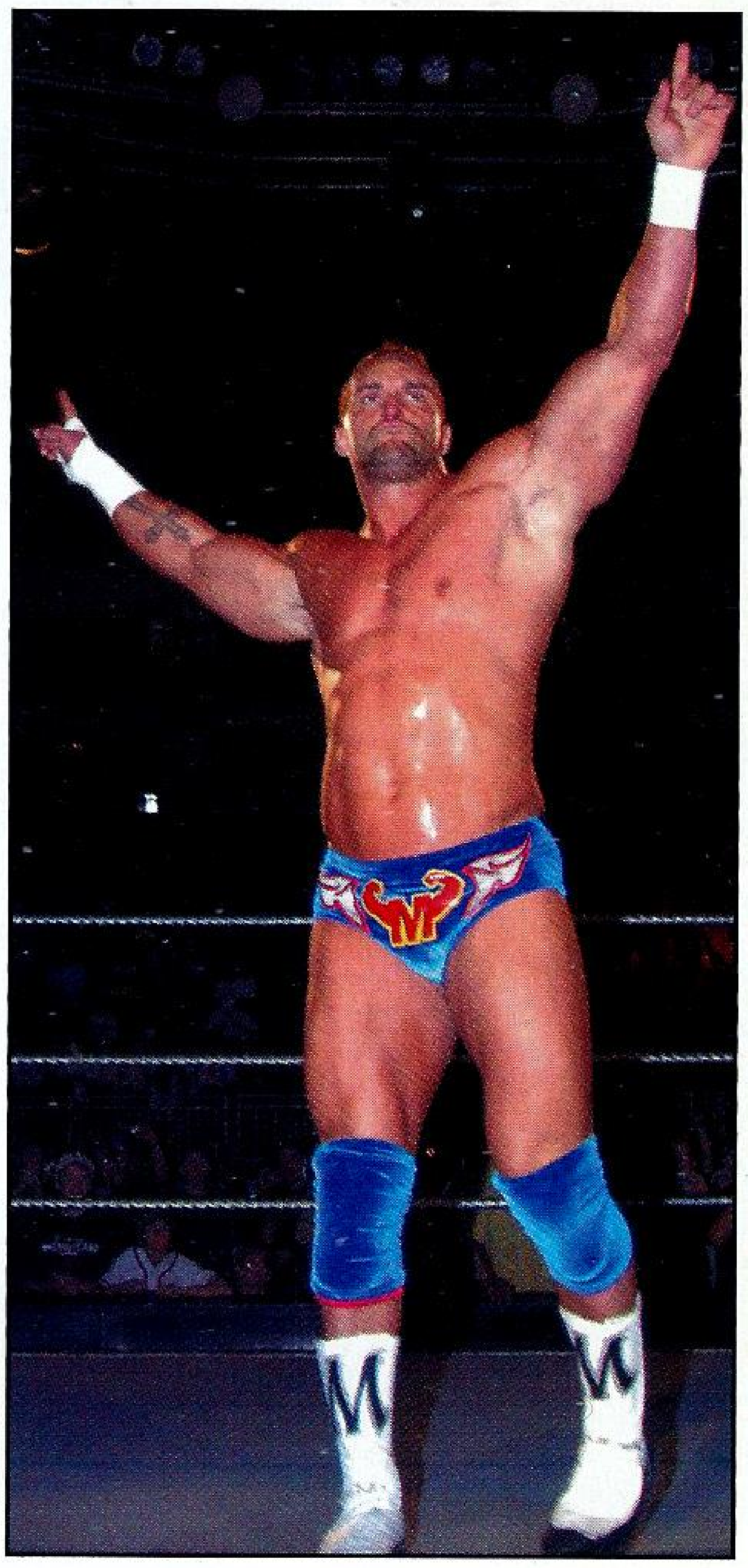
CHRIS MASTERS

FOR MANY WRESTLERS, becoming a WWE superstar is the pinnacle of their career. Week after week, hopefuls struggle to make it to the number-one company in all of professional wrestling. For Chris "Masters" Mordetzky, that dream was realized when he was called to appear on Raw, February 21, 2005. The wrestler known as "The Masterpiece" had a decent career in WWE ... but the dream ended with his unceremonious release in late-2007.

This could have been the end. After being kicked off wrestling's center stage, Masters could have panicked or, worse, slinked off to the scrap heap of wrestling history, but he wasn't going to disappear that easily.

"Just because I'm no longer with WWE doesn't mean my career won't become a 'masterpiece,'" he said. "What am I up to now? What aren't I up to?"

Since his departure from WWE, "The Masterpiece" has been very busy, taking every opportunity to see the world while still working in the sport he has grown so fond of.



Instantly recognizable for his size and muscle mass, which he gained as an amateur bodybuilder in Santa Monica, California, he still uses the "Masters" and "Masterpiece" names on occasion, but prefers to go by his real last name on most televised events these days. Masters has been all over Europe and Asia, competing in different Japanese programs where he could put his athleticism and size to use.

"Japan is special because the fans are so respectful and smart at the same time," he said. "I had my first match back for Inoki's new promotion after my release and elbow injury, but I just wasn't ready, being off only three months. I really want to go back for the fans there. I never missed a WWE European tour, but somehow never got to go to Japan with them."

Masters has also signed a one-year contract with the European-based Nu-Wrestling Evolution, and he's excited about the group's international potential. The company began primarily promoting in Italy, has expanded across Europe, and has been drawing very well in Spain of late. The roster is loaded with talented former WWE stars like Orlando Jordan, Ultimate Warrior, Rob Van Dam, and Kishi (formerly known as Rikishi in WWE), who helps on both the business and creative ends.

"NWE was the best overseas tour I've ever had," Masters said. "We stayed at beach resorts and really got to see the cities and the people in our downtime. Wrestling is on major television channels there, the equivalent of what Fox is here. There's something for everyone with Ultimo Dragon and Juventud, Orlando coming out with girls, it's a great blend of established name stars and the best indy workers available."

Chris recently worked for Harley Race's World League Wrestling promotion, where he played an integral part in Branden Tatum's victory over Dinn T. Moore during a lumberjack match. While the referee's back was turned, Masters snuck in and applied his famous, unbreakable, Masterlock full-nelson.

For the better part of his career, Masters has been portrayed as a narcissistic villain. But now that he has moved away from the egocentric character he once portrayed, Masters primarily works as a babyface and feels it comes across more naturally for him. "I had to work as a heel for almost five years, and now I feel that I can connect with the audience. I love working as a face."

But the new character is only one of the benefits Masters feels he's reaped from spending time on the indy circuit. Masters believes he's improved his mat and chain-wrestling skills as well since leaving WWE. "I get to work with a different guy every night, and in front of every possible crowd type," he said. "Working the indies really helps you become a better wrestler. I don't have to be this big, serious heel. I can be myself, have fun, and talk

Since leaving WWE, Chris Masters has replaced the haughty smirk with the contented smile of a babyface. Seen here with Derek Sanders, Masters credits the time he spent in the indies with fine-tuning his performances.

with fans. My best matches, believe it or not, have been on the indy circuit as a result."

At 25 years old, Masters knows he has plenty of time to hone his talents. "I do want to go back to WWE someday, because I don't feel I reached my full potential," he said. "I learned loads with Jimmy Cornette [in one-time WWE developmental area Ohio Valley Wrestling]. Sure, he's a taskmaster, but we all know every cell of this man loves wrestling. Jim Cornette is pro wrestling. Lance Storm and Danny Davis, too. Lance got all us OVW guys ready for TV and is an incredible trainer."

When asked if he would ever consider possibly making a mainstream comeback to an organization like TNA, Masters didn't shoot down the idea, but said that after being off the national stage for a little while, he needs to get the feel of the ring under his feet again before jumping back into the limelight.

"TNA's a great opportunity for anyone," he said. "But I just signed a year's contract with the NWE and I'd like to give myself a year or two to enjoy a little freedom, picking my own dates. When you work for WWE, and I'm not being critical, you have no personal life and barely can see family and friends. That has to be your life and we know that going in."

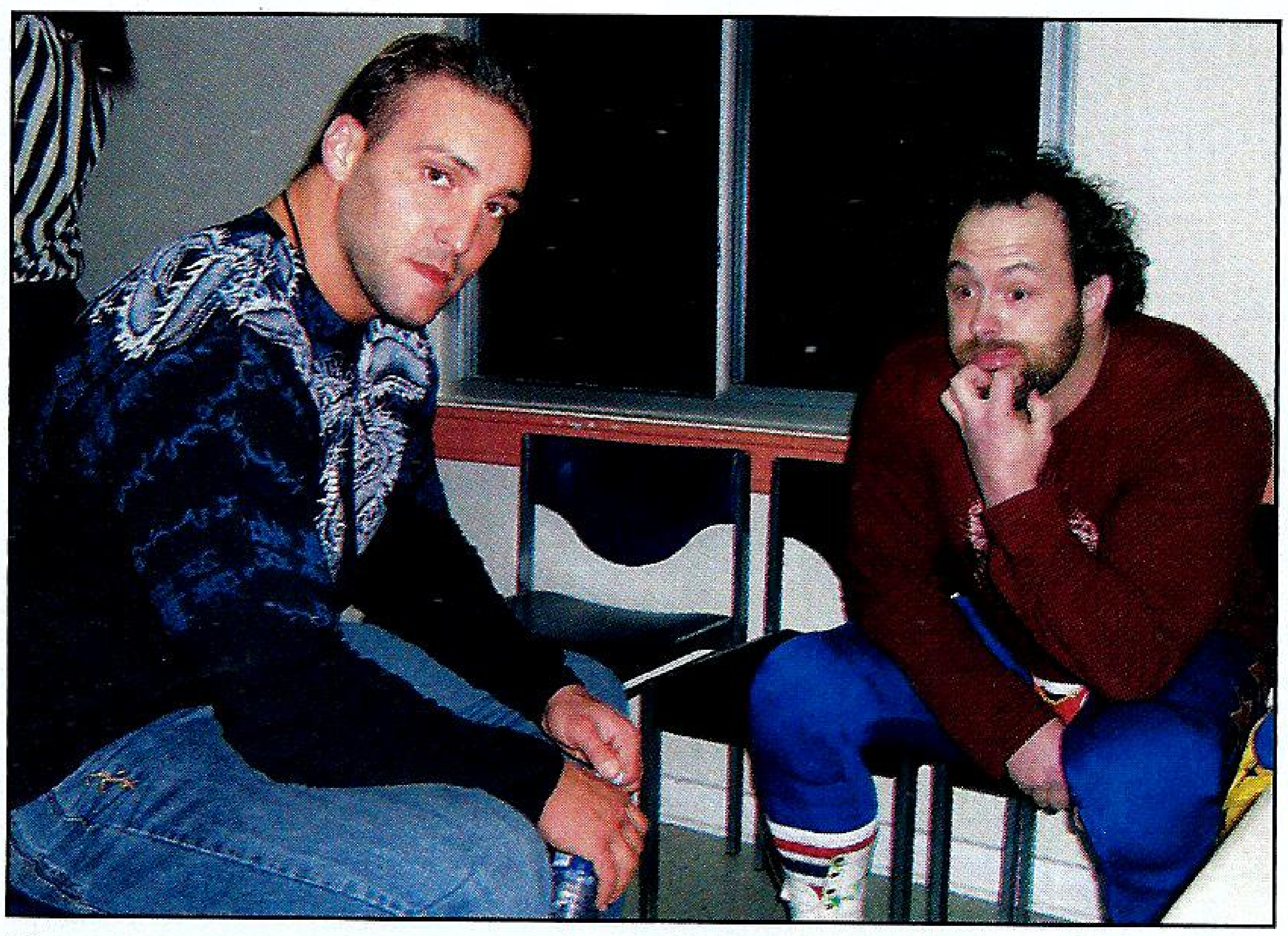
In his time spent in OVW, Masters built many relationships with other rising stars, such as Randy Orton, Matt Morgan, and John Cena, all of whom he still keeps in touch with. He's also developed some strong bonds competing in NEW.

"RVD is a friend who I also admire," he said. "Rob's had me on RVDTV and we discuss social and political issues on it. He's always ahead of his time and giving back to the business."

But out of all the great memories in his career to date, going to Iraq and performing for the American troops was the biggest. "It was indescribable for me and other WWE wrestlers," he said. "We'll take those memories to our graves."

For somebody with Masters' tools and age, losing a spot with WWE is more of a hiccup than a major setback. He knows the road back might be long and difficult, but he's committed to returning the right way—when he's ready to make another run at the big stage.

For bookings, e-mail Masters' agent at: Masterpiece83@gmail.com. ☐



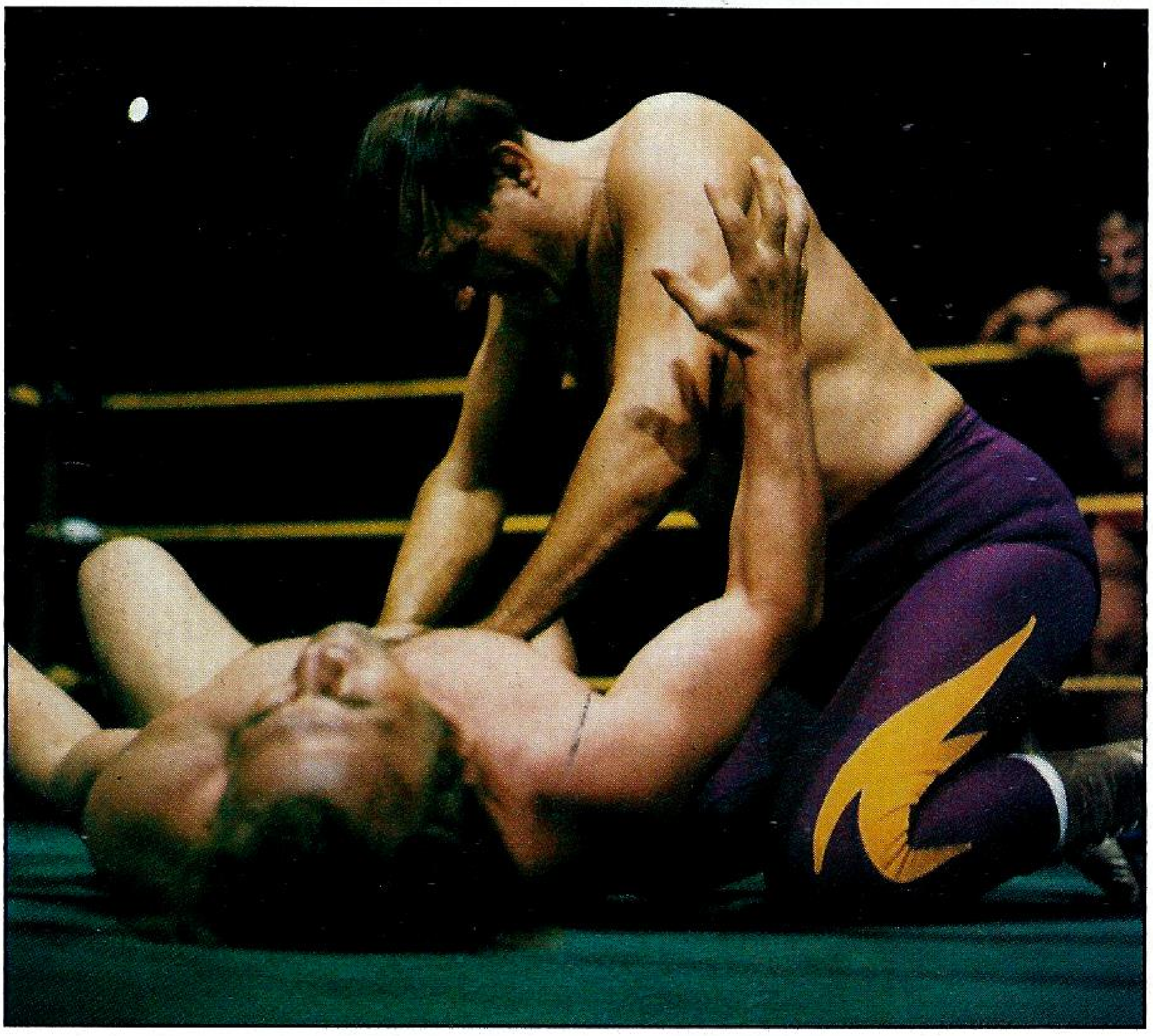
Throughout his career, Masters has valued the relationships he's forged with his co-workers. Nick "U-Gene" Dinsmore is just one of the many friends Masters made while competing in Ohio Valley Championship Wrestling, a former WWE developmental affiliate.

plain speaking

With Matt Brock

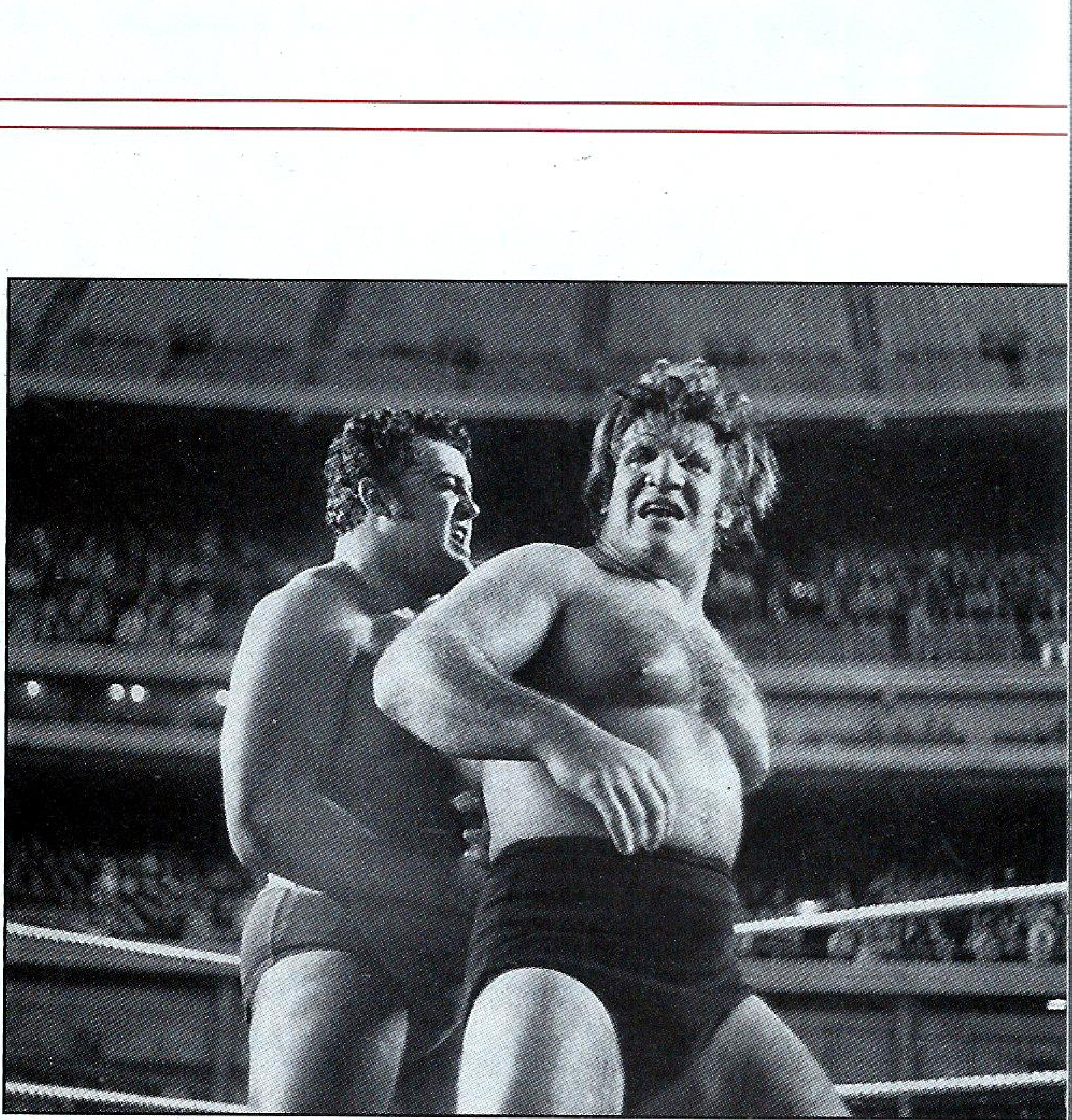
Harder than nails, veteran wrestling reporter Matt Brock has logged more miles covering wrestling than any other journalist. Every month Matt will travel to the sport's hotbeds, reporting everything he sees without fear or favor

EVERETT, MA: Sometimes you can find out all you need to know about a man by the way he lived, and sometimes you can find out all you need to know about a man by the way he died. So if you knew nothing about Walter "Killer" Kowalski until you read his obituary in some newspaper, you would've known all you needed to know by this fact: Kowalski died 12 days after his family decided to take him off life support. From what I've been told, most people, especially 81-year-olds like Kowalski, die a day or two after being taken off life support, especially when they'd suffered a massive heart attack like Kowalski. But not "The Killer." His body battled for 12 days because submitting to anything—especially death—just wasn't in the man's makeup. ¶So here's the final word on Kowalski. Here's what they should inscribe on his tombstone: "Died 12 Days After He Was Supposed To Be Dead." And that's something you know he would've been awfully proud of, maybe as proud as he was of his wrestling school, which he opened back in the late-1970s and operated until 2003: Killer Kowalski's School of Professional Wrestling. The graduates include John Kronus, Triple-H, Chyna, Big John Studd, and many more who Kowalski helped achieve their dreams of becoming professional wrestlers. ¶And that's one of the things about Kowalski: his unselfishness. A lot of men retire from the sport and milk it for all they can. A lot of men just refuse to retire until they're wheeled out. Kowalski retired and figured out a way to pass his talents and love of wrestling along to the next generation. ¶By the way, one last comment about him: The man was a lifelong committed bachelor until he got married in 2006. And I'm going to just leave it at that.



R.I.P. KILLER KOWALSKI: 1926 - 2008

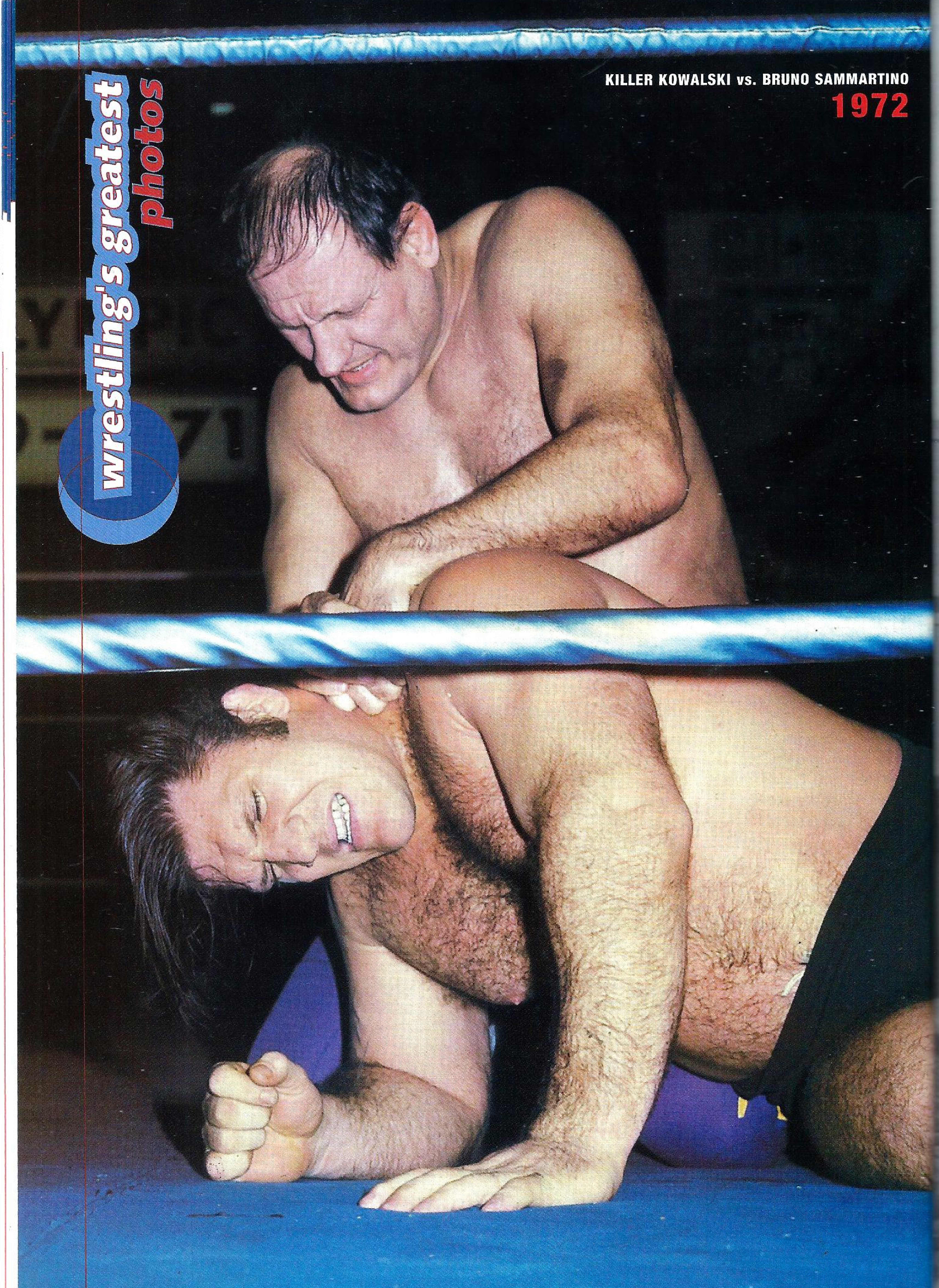
CLEVELAND, OH: The fact that Chris Jericho turned out to be the star of WWE's Unforgiven pay-per-view came as a surprise to everyone, considering he wasn't even supposed to be on the card. That he won the World heavyweight title scramble—one of the most bizarre concepts I've seen in over half a century of covering this beat—was even more surprising, considering that earlier in the night, he barely survived a brutal beating by Shawn Michaels. ¶Michaels seemed to be using Jericho's bean as a punching bag, and the match had to be stopped when he knocked Jericho unconscious. So then what happens? Jericho arises from the dead and wins the scramble, which pretty much tells you that the World heavyweight title is now in the hands of, at best, the second-best wrestler in WWE, because Jericho certainly isn't as good as Michaels, as everybody in the arena found out about an hour or so earlier. ¶The fact of the matter is that wrestling has always had too many championships. Back in the day, the WWF Intercontinental championship had some prestige, but everyone knew it was nothing more than a steppingstone to the World title. Of course, federations like to have lots of titles because that means lots of title matches, which means more stuff to scream about on the marquee. The bottom line, though, is that if you walk into the locker room, there's really only one title anyone wants, and that's the big one, and everything else is nothing but a marketing scam. ¶On this card, there was a World heavyweight title scramble, an ECW title scramble and a WWE title scramble. There were also World tag team title matches and Divas title matches, and if every fan walked out of the building completely confused, well, who could blame them? But that's never gonna change, not ever, not as long as there's money to be made from what goes on in the squared circle. Of course, golden geese have been killed before.



PEDRO VS. BRUNO AT SHEA STADIUM

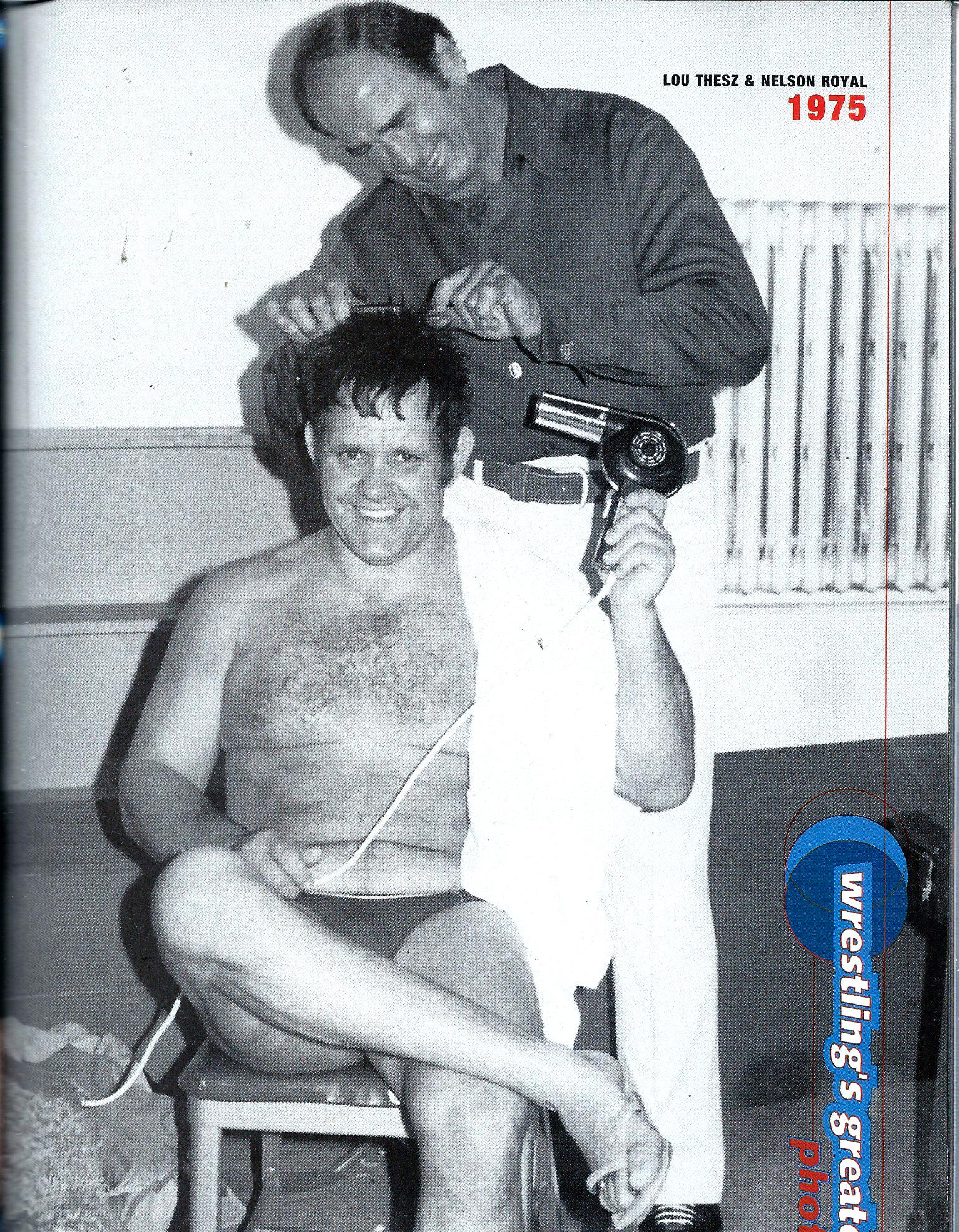
FLUSHING, NY: Shea Stadium, home of the baseball Mets and former home of the football Jets, has seen its last game and now has a date with the wrecking ball. Lots of Shea memories have been passed around over the past several months, from the Mets to the Jets to the Beatles, but everyone seemed to have forgotten about pro wrestling. Yeah, I'm talking about the squared circle in the big diamond, and it happened three times at Shea, and every card was memorable. Every one became an important part of wrestling history. ¶Like in 1972, when Pedro Morales wrestled Bruno Sammartino to a 75-minute curfew draw and retained the WWWF World title, and in 1980, when Bruno beat Larry Zbyszko in perhaps the greatest steel cage match ever, and in between in 1976, when Bruno beat Stan Hansen and Andre the Giant destroyed boxer Chuck Wepner—tossed him around the old stadium is what he did—on the undercard of the Ali-Inoki boxer vs. wrestler bout beamed on the big screen from Japan. ¶Three big cards, three big crowds, and not a clunker in the bunch. Three for three. That's something no other stadium or arena—not even all those late, great Sportatoriums in Florida and Texas—can boast. Say goodbye to another era.

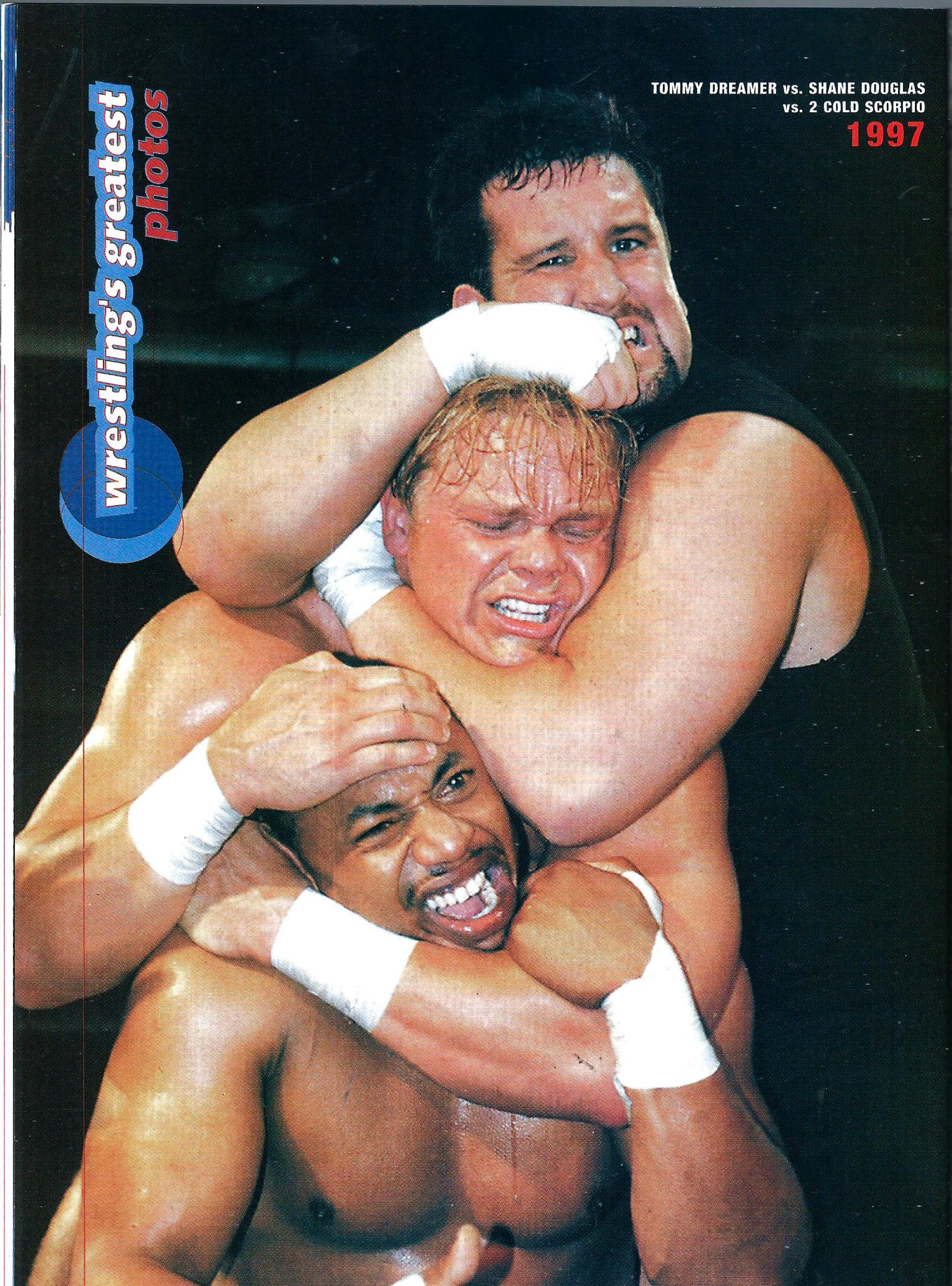
NEW YORK, NY: If there's such a thing as the Matt Brock Era—Saks says there is, but personally, I don't think anyone's ever gonna measure anything by when I lived and when I die—the good doc may have extended it a bit the other day. "The seeds are taking well," he told me, which was his way of telling me that things are better now with the ol' prostate than they were a few months ago. We'll see about that. Life is a little bit like a wrestling match. Just when things are brightest, one slip-up and they can go bad, and just when things look bleakest, well, whaddya know, suddenly the underdog is the favorite. ¶So that's the story, and who knows what next month will bring, but I'm going to tell you this: I'm sick of writing about it. Sick and tired. From now on, no medical updates from Brock. And if this column suddenly disappears from this space, you'll know what happened.☐



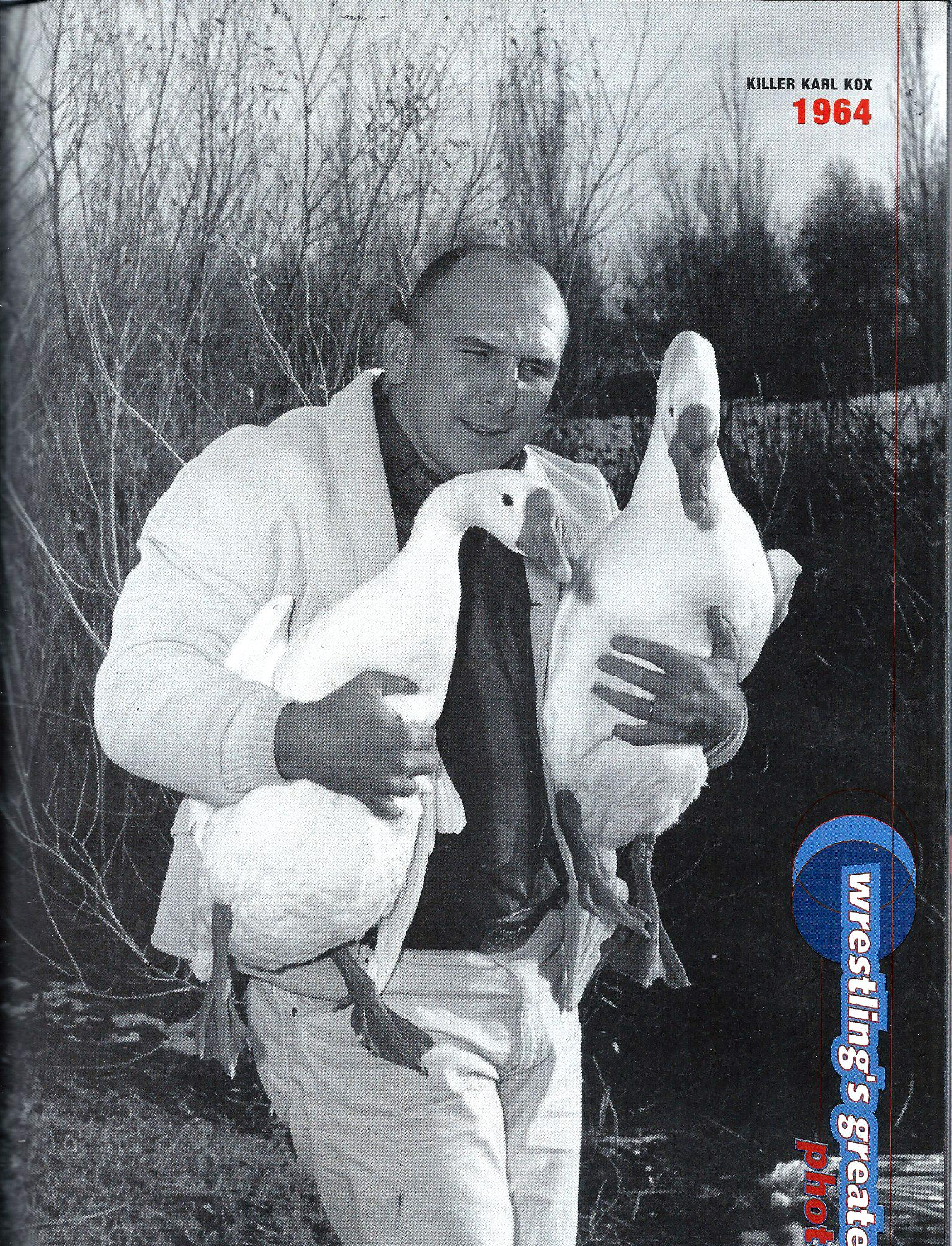
KILLER KOWALSKI vs. BRUNO SAMMARTINO
1972

LOU THESZ & NELSON ROYAL
1975

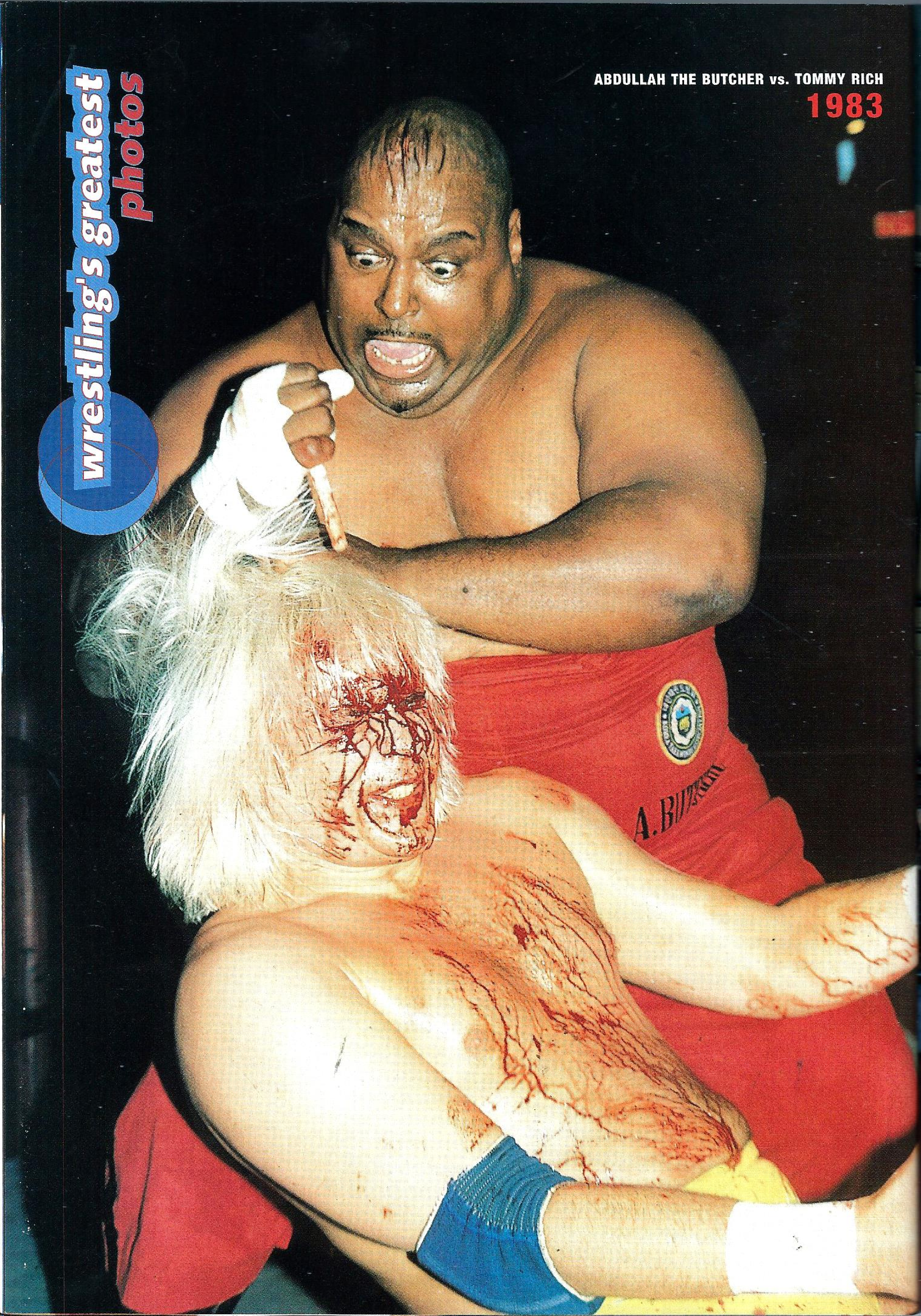




TOMMY DREAMER vs. SHANE DOUGLAS
vs. 2 COLD SCORPIO
1997



KILLER KARL KOX
1964



ABDULLAH THE BUTCHER vs. TOMMY RICH

1983

PAUL LONDON vs. MIKE SHANE

2002

PRESENTING THE TURNBUCKLE TURKEY AWARDS

TURNBUCKLE TURKEY
2008
AWARDS

THE HUNT FOR our Turnbuckle Turkeys has never been easier. In fact, it seems as if the pro wrestling landscape is just littered with prize gobblers these days. Everywhere you look, there's yet another wrestler saying something stupid, doing something stupid, or otherwise making a complete fool of himself.

Each year in this section, we recognize the biggest turkeys in the sport. We're not talking about your average rulebreakers. We're talking about the crème de la turkeys: those wrestlers or wrestling personalities, whose actions, arrogance, or foolishness have caused embarrassment to themselves and to the sport of wrestling.

Take, for example, The Sandman. The former ECW champion decided that a birthday party for Lou Albano was a good place to start throwing glasses around and assaulting wait staff and police officers ... never a good idea. And then there was Michael Hayes, who claims he always thought of himself as being a black man. Well, Mikey, just because you consider yourself to be a black man doesn't give you carte blanche to throw around racial epithets. That's certainly not the sort of behavior we expect from a front office employee of a publicly traded company.

Larry Sweeney tried to make light of rape, Bret Hart trashed a journalist, Carlito whined ... and whined ... and whined. And Vince McMahon—well, Vince McMahon has become a regular recipient of this annual award.

Over the next 20 pages, we identify the 10 biggest turkeys of the past 12 months. This year, we awarded several Turnbuckle Turkeys to non-wrestlers: two retired Hall-of-Famers, a manager, a chairman, a writer, and a general manager. We condemned a Knockout for not using common sense, a Wildcat for leaping without looking, and a Hitman for making a personal vendetta public at an inopportune moment.

The biggest turkey of the year has to be Hulk Hogan. He implied that the victim in his son's car accident brought about his fate because of bad karma. Then he had an affair with a woman half his age. Hard to believe Hulk was a guy who preached about taking the moral high ground for all those years, isn't it?

We want to know what you think of this year's awards. Please write to us at Turnbuckle Turkeys, PO Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA, 19034, or e-mail us at insideletters@yahoo.com. Now, go ahead—enjoy your Turnbuckle Turkeys. Just hope they don't leave a bitter taste in your mouth.

MIKE ADAMLE

A portrait of Ronald Reagan hangs in the general manager's office during each edition of Raw. The 40th President of the United States is an inspiration for current Raw GM Mike Adamle, who no doubt admired Reagan's decisiveness, commitment to principles, and overall leadership abilities.

At the risk of flattering this 2008 Turnbuckle Turkey recipient, there is at least one example of Reagan finding himself in a similar situation as Adamle. Reagan worked at a radio station in Des Moines, Iowa, in the early-1930s, and one of his many responsibilities was to announce baseball games. Very basic information was sent to the radio station via telegraph, and, even though Reagan had attended only one baseball game in his life, it was his job to add fictionalized descriptions to the barebones reports to give them more color.

During a game between the Chicago Cubs and the St. Louis Cardinals, the wire went dead, forcing Reagan to improvise most of the ninth inning. For nearly seven minutes, Reagan called numerous foul balls and described a "red-headed kid" who had scrambled to retrieve a souvenir ball, among other imaginary incidents. And Reagan didn't even have the benefit of someone (i.e. Jim Ross or even Vince McMahon) feeding lines to him through his headset!

Contrast Reagan's adroit handling of that situation to Adamle walking off the April 29 broadcast of ECW before the main event. In our opinion, McMahon should have let Adamle keep on walking. In the weeks leading up to his walkout, Adamle had repeatedly referred to WWE as "WW," he called Tazz "The Tazz," and, at one point during a tag team match, he said that Tommy Dreamer had "tapped off" rather than "tagged out."

WWE executives should've got a clue when Adamle, making his debut as an interviewer at this year's Royal Rumble, referred to Jeff Hardy as "Jeff Harvey." During his tenure as ECW's play-by-play announcer between April and July, he struggled to remember wrestlers' names and often flubbed the names of moves.

Currently a sports anchor for NBC's affiliate in Chicago, Adamle has a wealth of experience as a pre-game show studio host and a sideline reporter for live games. He has served as co-host of Professional Bull Riders events and Bravo's Battle Of The Network Reality Stars. But why did Vince McMahon think this 59-year-old former NFL player was qualified to call professional wrestling action?

He was qualified because he hosted *American Gladiators* for seven years. That's just one more reason why the Turnbuckle Turkey will be renamed the "Vince McMahon Award" someday.

Considering Adamle's 30 years of broadcast experience, his arrogance and ineptitude are unforgivable. He obviously did not make the effort to learn about pro wrestling, let alone gain an appreciation of it. Instead, Adamle revealed a condescending attitude toward the fans, whom he assumed would be stupid enough to believe he was a competent announcer.

Now, like his political hero, Adamle has made the transition from sports announcer to executive authority figure. Let's hope he takes his responsibilities as Raw GM more seriously than his duties as ECW play-by-play announcer.

Mike Adamle, you're no Ronald Reagan. And you're certainly not a "Great Communicator."

No excuse for not doing your homework

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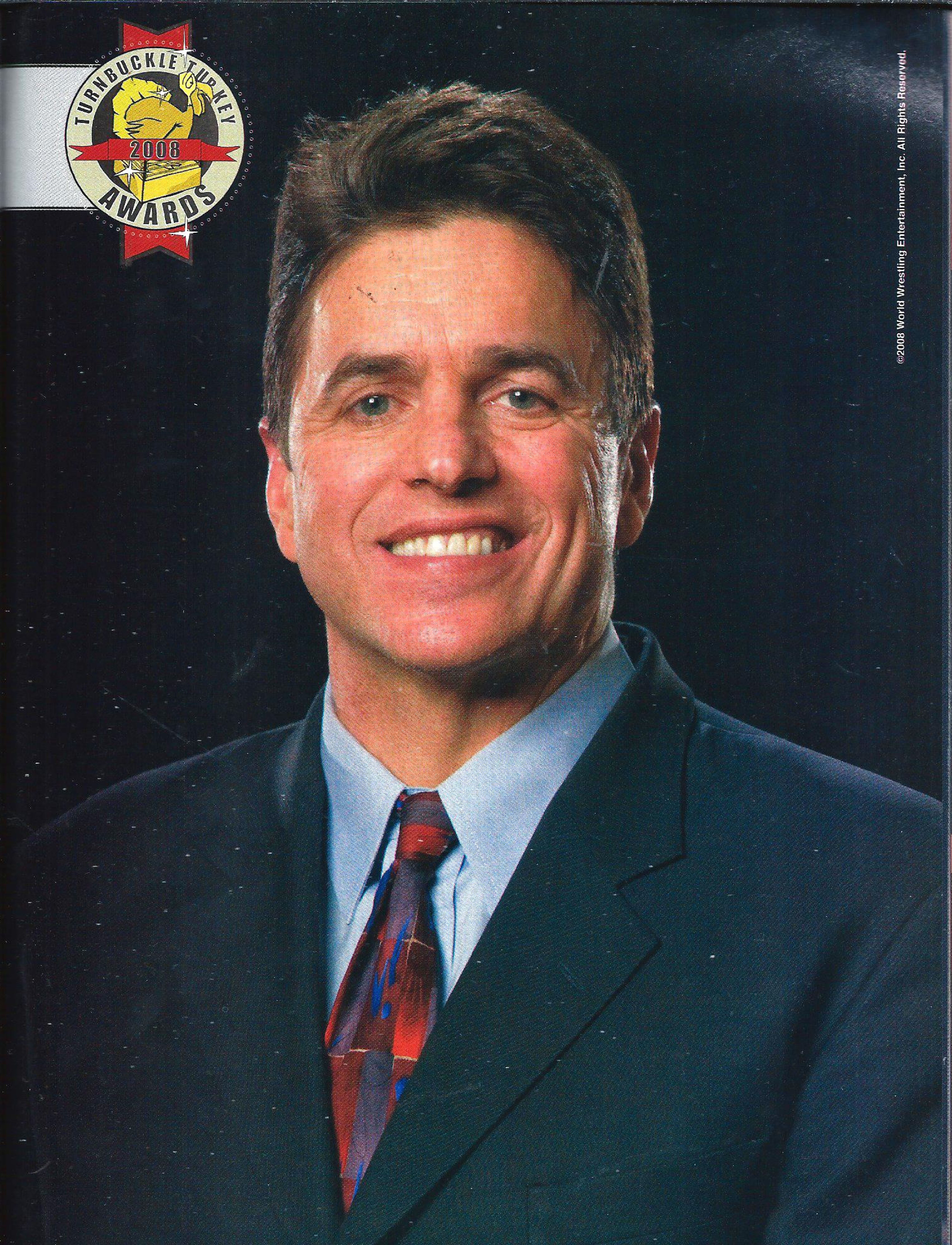

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BRET HART

"The best there is, the best there was, and the best there ever will be?" Well, not in Greg Oliver's book, that's for sure.

"The Hitman" picked a lousy time to air a personal grievance, resulting in an awkward standoff and an uncharacteristically classless move by Bret Hart.

On June 28, Hart attended the 2008 induction ceremony at the George Tragos/Lou Thesz Hall of Fame, a wrestling museum that honors wrestlers who have had success in both professional and amateur competition. Hart was on hand to induct his father, Stu.

After a few opening remarks about how proud he was to be in the presence of such wrestling legends as Harley Race and Larry Hennig, Hart went off on a bizarre and unprovoked tangent, attacking Oliver, a wrestling journalist and author who was being honored (along with his co-author Steven Johnson) as the recipient of the Jim Melby Award for excellence in pro wrestling journalism. Hart was apparently still bitter about Oliver's 2003 book, *The Pro Wrestling Hall Of Fame: The Canadians*, which opened with a ranking of the top 20 Canadian wrestlers of all-time, as determined by Oliver and Johnson.

Hart was miffed because he was ranked at number 14, and he let loose on Oliver:

"I know this isn't my place to gripe about stuff, but I have a serious issue with people who write books about wrestling who don't honor the truth, and you, sir, you do not honor the truth of wrestling," Hart said to Oliver. He continued his rant for several minutes, saying that the media doesn't understand the "art of wrestling" and that writers like Oliver didn't deserve to be in the same room as himself and his fellow wrestlers.

"It makes me laugh that Greg Oliver here rated me behind [midget wrestler] Sky Low Low, as, I think, the 13th greatest Canadian wrestler," Hart said. He then demanded that either Oliver leave or he would. When Oliver refused to leave, the flustered Hart walked out.

So, at an event that was designed to honor the achievements of wrestlers like his father, Hart let his ego take over and made the entire evening about his feud with a journalist. Instead of honoring the "art of wrestling," Hart did the exact same thing he has done ever since the Montreal screwjob of 1997—he whined, he complained, and he turned around and went home.

Hart tried to ruin what should have been a very special night for Oliver and Johnson. The writers were there to receive a prestigious award and be honored alongside some of the sport's all-time greats. Rather than let them have their moment, Hart tried to hog the spotlight and ended up coming off as a self-absorbed bully. Kudos to Oliver for standing tall and putting him in his place, instead of doing the easy thing and backing down.

We wonder how upset Hart would be if he had known that Oliver and Johnson didn't include The Hart Foundation in their list of the top 25 tag teams of all time in their subsequent book *The Pro Wrestling Hall of Fame: The Tag Teams.*

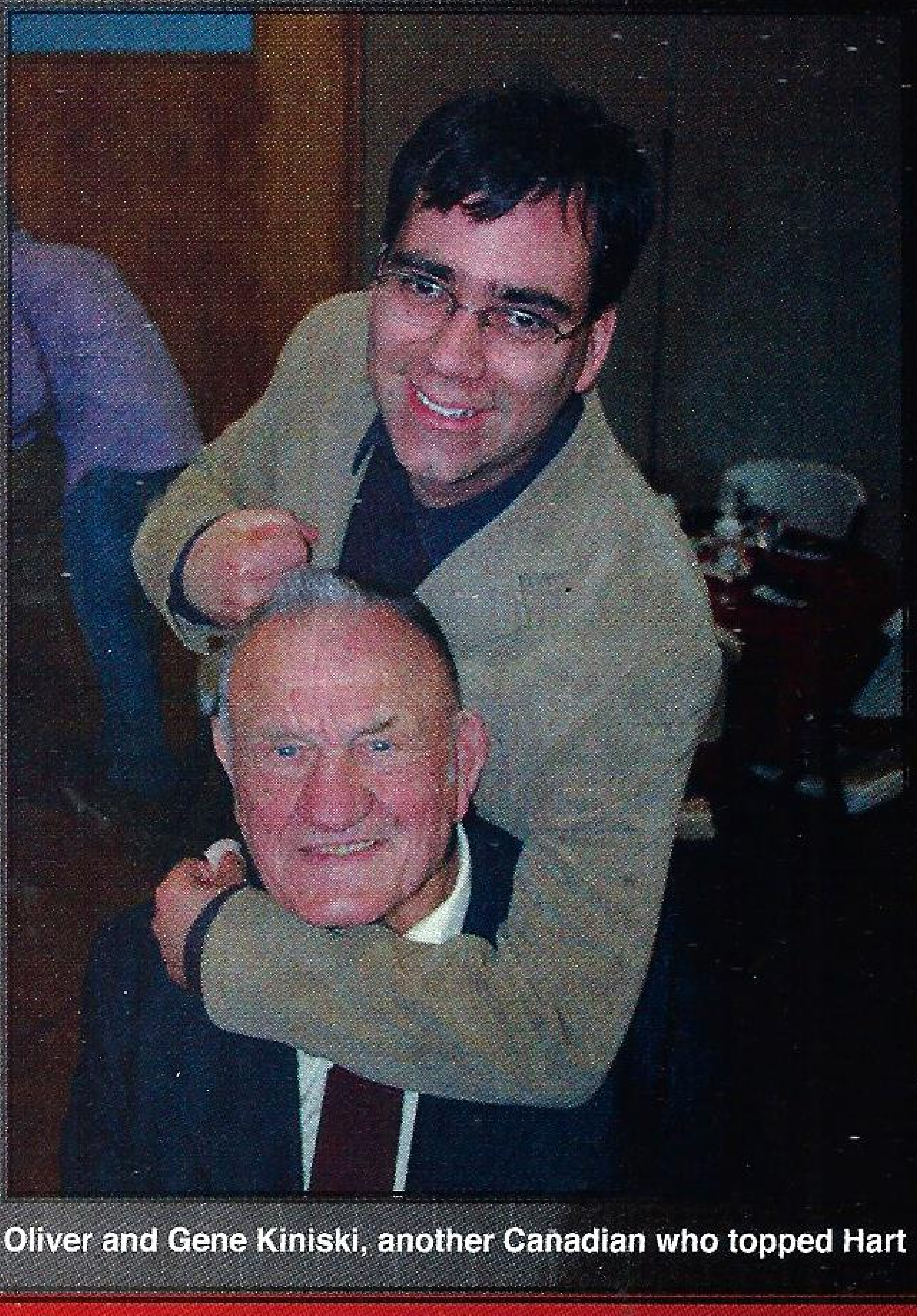


Photo by Dave Drason Burzynski

Oliver and Gene Kiniski, another Canadian who topped Hart

TURNBUCKLE TURKEY 2008 AWARDS

Photo by George Napolitano

CARLITO

Second-generation superstar Carlos "Carlito" Colon Jr. has all of the natural talent, charisma, and genetics it takes to be a major superstar in the wrestling business. His fluency in both English and Spanish also makes him a ready-made crossover star, who appeals both to Latino and English-speaking fans.

If you don't believe us, just ask Carlito. He'd be the first to tell you.

In reality, though, Carlito has been an underachiever. And that's mainly because his effort, intensity, and execution in the ring often drift like a leaf in the Caribbean trade winds.

Some nights he's brilliant. Most nights, though, wrestlers with a fraction of his ability outperform him. It's no wonder WWE fans are just as frustrated as Carlito is. After all, this is a man who won the Intercontinental title in his Raw debut and the U.S. championship in his Smackdown debut back in 2004.

To make matters worse, Carlito has developed the reputation for being a chronic malcontent who is given to pouting, sulking, finger-pointing, and making excuses—not all that unlike his WWE character, minus the apple spitting, of course.

According to WWE insiders, Carlito has been on the verge of reaching the breaking point with WWE on several occasions. But fearful of releasing him too soon and potentially giving away a superstar to TNA, the federation has repeatedly extended the olive branch.

Allegedly, WWE Chairman Vince McMahon himself talked Carlito out of requesting his release. To make things more appealing, Carlito reportedly got a raise and the pledge of a heavier push, especially in Spanish-speaking markets. It could have been a win-win situation: Carlito would have received a push and WWE would have raised its appeal to Latino fans, a demographic Vince is reportedly very eager to tap.

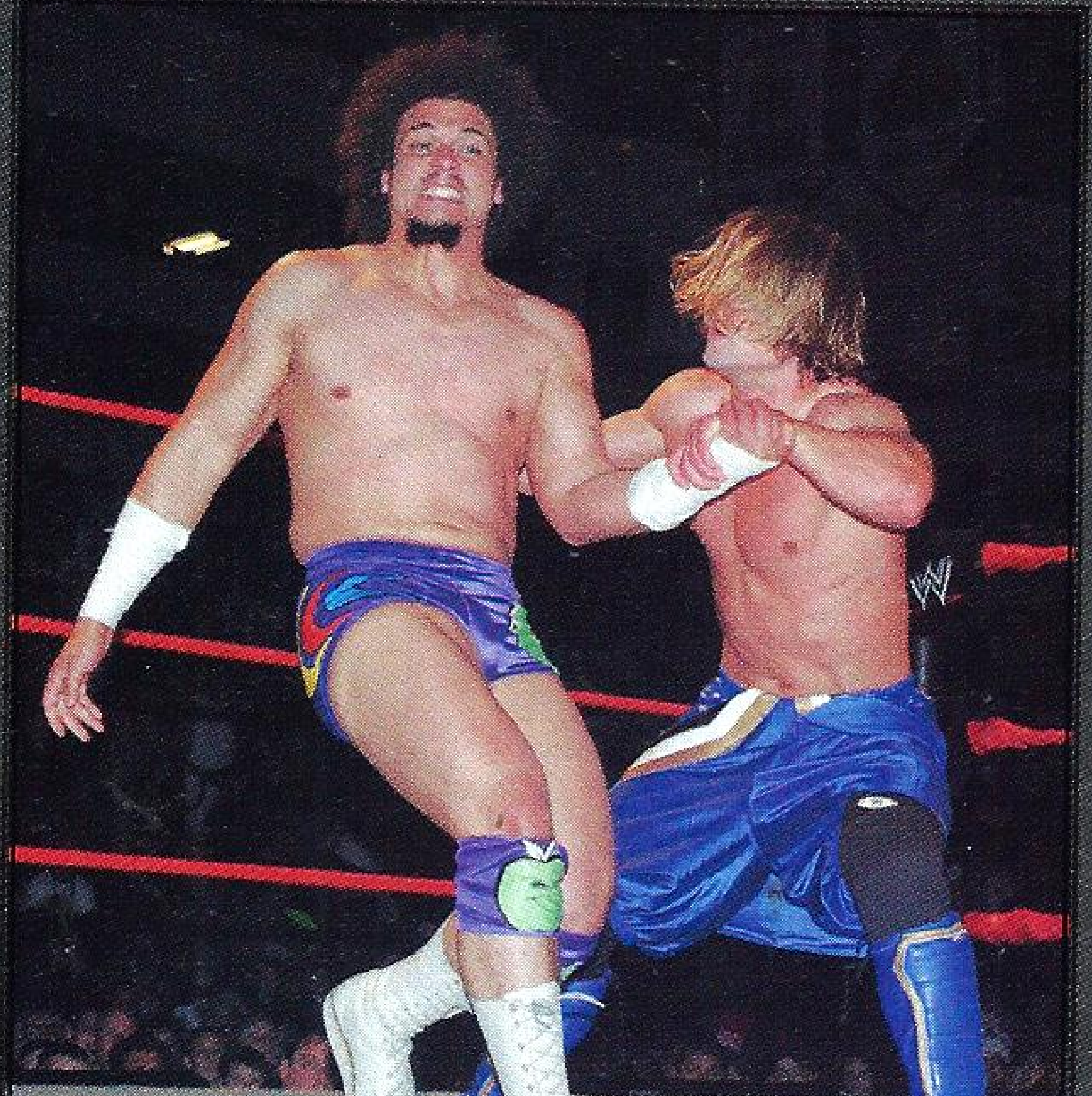
Unfortunately, the truce lasted all of a few weeks until Carlito began whining again about being underutilized. Reports were rampant that his in-ring performance and backstage attitude had reached all-time lows.

A trip to Puerto Rico to appear on his father Carlos Colon's biggest WWC show of the year—Anniversario 2008—temporarily piqued Carlito's interest, but his slide in WWE quickly resumed as he promptly got lost in the Smackdown shuffle after being sent over from Raw in the June draft.

It has become uncomfortable to watch Carlito's infrequent appearances on WWE television. He has the look of a man resigned to go through the motions and collect his paycheck. By this point, it would probably be best for both sides to part ways.

But no matter what happens, Carlito needs only to look in the mirror to find the biggest culprit in his disappointing U.S. mainland career to date. If he fails, he'll only have himself to blame.

Every wrestler faces challenges at some point in his career. It is how the wrestler responds to those challenges that distinguish the good from the truly great. Obviously, WWE saw a reason to scale back Carlito's push. Now it is up to Carlito to show WWE officials why limiting him was a mistake. Showing more focus and intensity in the ring will prove his critics wrong. Moaning the blues will not.



Petulant behavior isn't cool

TURNBUCKLE TURKEY 2008 AWARDS

Photo by George Napolitano

CHRIS HARRIS

Chris Harris traded a promising career in TNA for a cup of coffee in ECW.

Back in 2003, Chris Harris emerged as a surprise breakout singles star, coming within a hair's breadth of taking the NWA World title from Jeff Jarrett on several occasions as his America's Most Wanted partner, James Storm, was recuperating from an injury.

When Storm returned, Harris reformed America's Most Wanted, and the team established itself as arguably the best team in the history of TNA. But Harris was never happy. He complained that AMW wasn't appreciated enough. He fed rumors that WWE talent scouts were hungry to sign him and Storm away from TNA. In fact, he spent the second half of 2007 sulking around TNA, openly complaining about his spot on the card until he finally left the company.

In January 2008, it was announced that Harris had signed a WWE contract. But if he expected to walk into the company and make an immediate impact, he was sadly mistaken.

Harris was shipped off to Florida Championship Wrestling, WWE's developmental territory, and was relegated to competing on just a handful of WWE dark matches. On July 8, Harris finally showed up on WWE television ... or, should we say, "Braden Walker" made his debut.

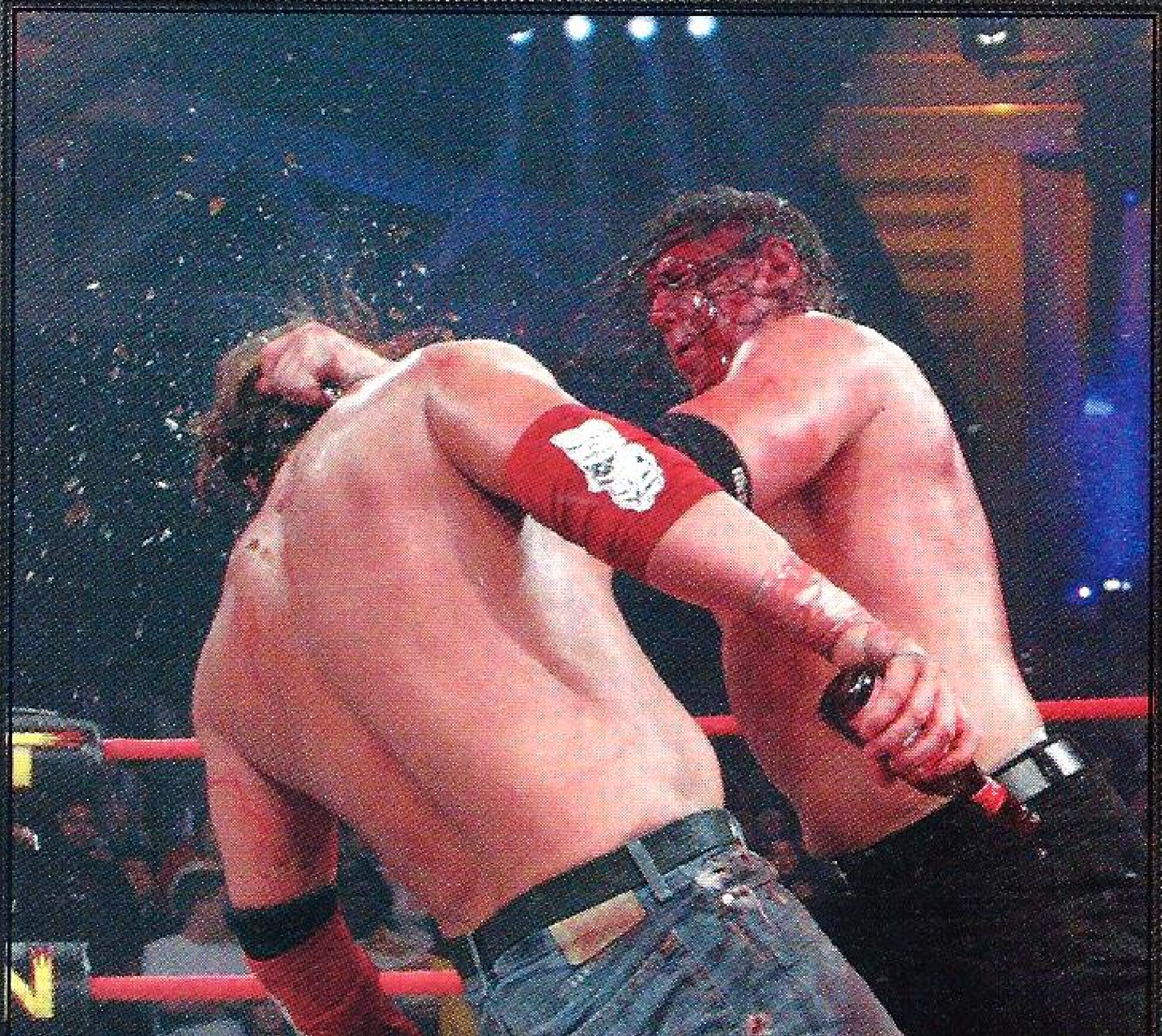
Despite being one of TNA's top stars for five years, Harris was forced to start from scratch with a new name and generic ring gear. ECW General Manager Theodore Long introduced Walker as part of his new talent initiative and made a match pitting Walker against Armando Estrada. Walker won that match, but looked less than impressive in his debut. Harris/Walker looked out of shape and clumsy and bore very little resemblance to the young lion that was once poised to be a TNA main-eventer.

A couple of weeks later, Walker reappeared on ECW and scored a win over James Curtis, but on August 7—less than one month after his TV debut—he was released from WWE.

For the better part of the past four years, Harris has implied that TNA held him back from realizing his true potential in WWE. He bombed out in WWE, and it's highly unlikely that TNA would welcome him back, given the way he left that company.

Harris did more than simply derail his own career by blowing his opportunity with WWE. He also made TNA look bad by extension. Harris was one of TNA's featured performers, but he was barely a preliminary competitor in ECW. Harris learned the grass isn't always greener on the other side of the fence, and Braden Walker became a punchline in ECW history, right up there with The Zombie.

Chris Harris gambled and suffered the loss. Now he has to live with the consequences of his action.



Not as wanted by America as he had believed

TURNBUCKLE TURKEY 2008 AWARDS

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MICHAEL HAYES

Doesn't it seem as if time has passed Michael Hayes by? Perhaps racist comments were acceptable in white promoters' offices throughout the South back in 1978, but racial slurs are no longer acceptable in the workplace. Apparently, "P.S." didn't get the memo.

WWE executives suspended Hayes for 60 days without pay in April, and required him to undergo further evaluation upon his return. But if Hayes had worked in any other industry in corporate America, he likely would have lost his job altogether.

Maybe Hayes thought he was still working for Bill Watts when he hurled the slur at Mark Henry during a party on WrestleMania weekend. A tipsy Hayes, who was criticizing Henry for being too bland, said, "I'm more of a n___ than you are."

That's what landed Hayes in trouble ... again. Hayes has created controversy before and, surprisingly enough, alcohol is usually involved. At the wedding of Triple-H and Stephanie McMahon in 2003, a drunken Hayes insisted on singing "Jailhouse Rock" and other ditties until the back-up band refused to play along. He continued without music and dedicated another song to the newlyweds, saying, "This song goes out to Stephanie and Hunter. [Expletive], I mean Stephanie and Paul, the 'Billion-Dollar Princess' and the 'Million-Dollar Talent.'" Linda McMahon finally grabbed the microphone from him.

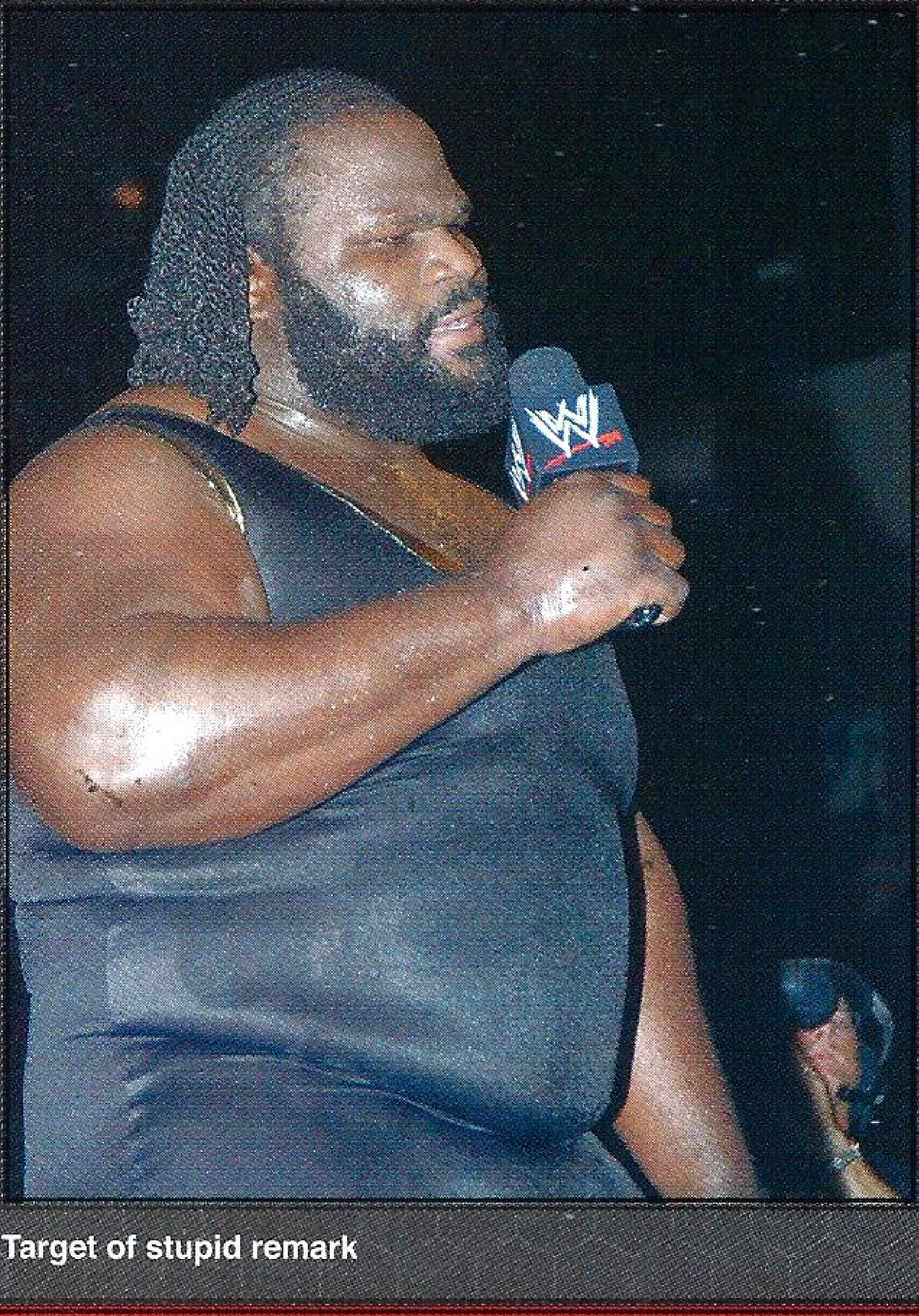
In other words, if there's juvenile behavior in WWE, you can bet Hayes is somewhere in the mix.

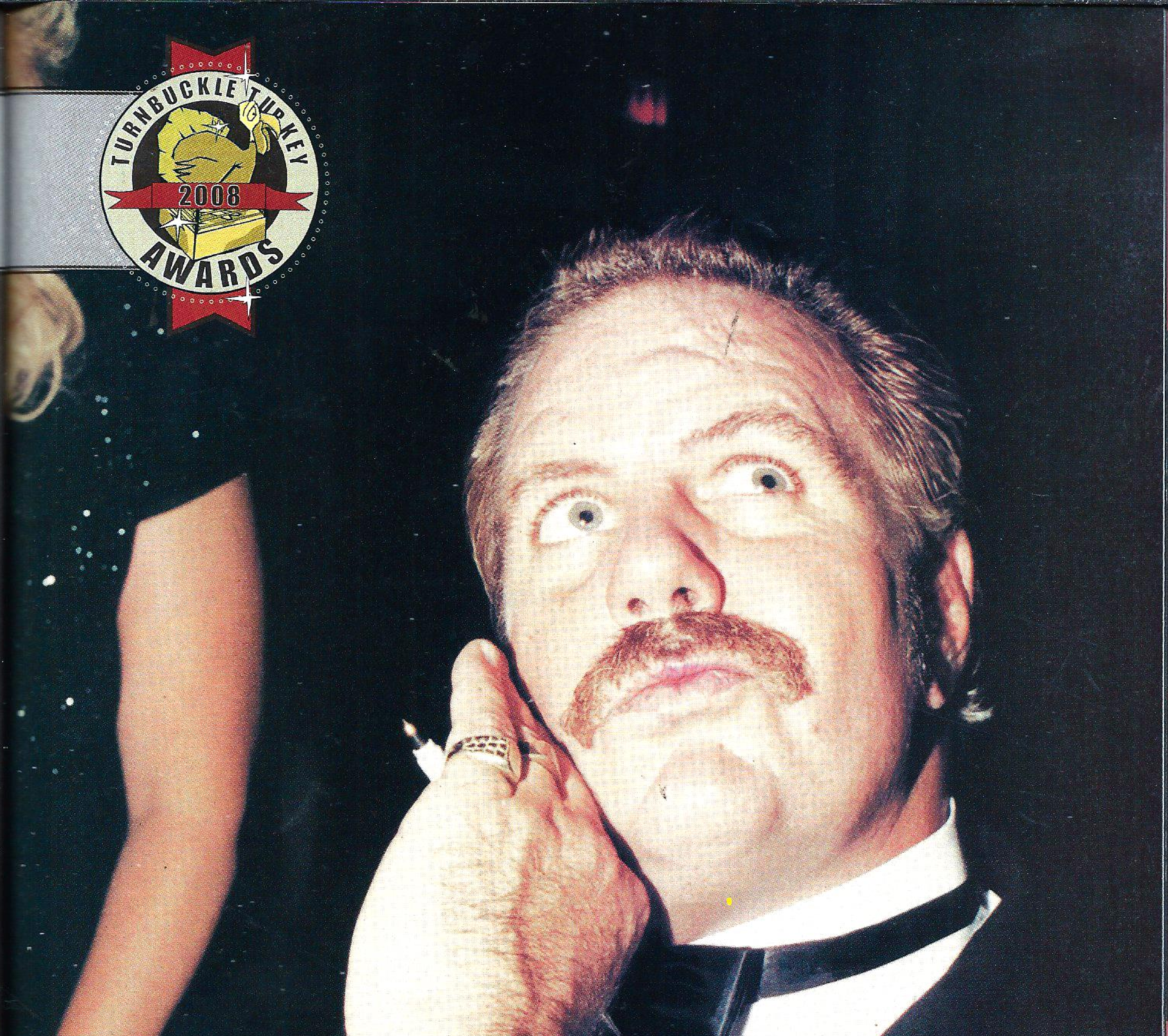
It was widely reported that a rift between Bobby Lashley and Hayes, the head writer for Smackdown, was the primary reason for the former ECW champ's departure earlier this year. It was rumored that Lashley agreed to remain silent about the matter in exchange for an early release from WWE. In an interview with *The Voice Of Wrestling* show on wrestlezone.com, Lashley refused to blame Hayes directly, instead saying, "The person in charge at the time of writing me back into the show was Michael Hayes ... He said he didn't have anything for me ... Whether I had bad blood with him, I can tell you I personally don't like the guy."

During an interview with the *U.K. Sun*, Booker T was asked about the Lashley situation and his own relationship with Hayes while he was on Smackdown. "I never had any problems with Michael Hayes," replied Booker. "I feel like that issue was just one person not knowing the other. I've known Michael for many, many years ... and Michael always thought he was black. He was always saying black things in a black way. I think whatever happened up there was taken out of context and has been blown way out of proportion."

Mark Henry probably doesn't think Hayes' comment was appropriate—in or out of context. And should we really give the benefit of a doubt to a man who used to wear a Confederate flag ring robe?

This Thanksgiving, we'll have some Southern-fried Freebird with our stuffing and cranberries.


Target of stupid remark



LARRY SWEENEY

For better or worse, sexually suggestive storylines have been a part of pro wrestling for more than a decade, with WWE, WCW, and ECW all providing their share of sleaze. Since TNA's debut six years ago, it too has taken the low road on occasion when it has come to interactions with the company's Knockouts.

Since its inception in 2002, Ring of Honor has prided itself on delivering a purer product—free of the lowbrow nonsense that often obscures a promotion's in-ring product.

But in February, ROH sank to the crass depths of the wrestling companies from which it has long sought to distinguish itself with an incident so tasteless, it made even the most hardened wrestling fan blush.

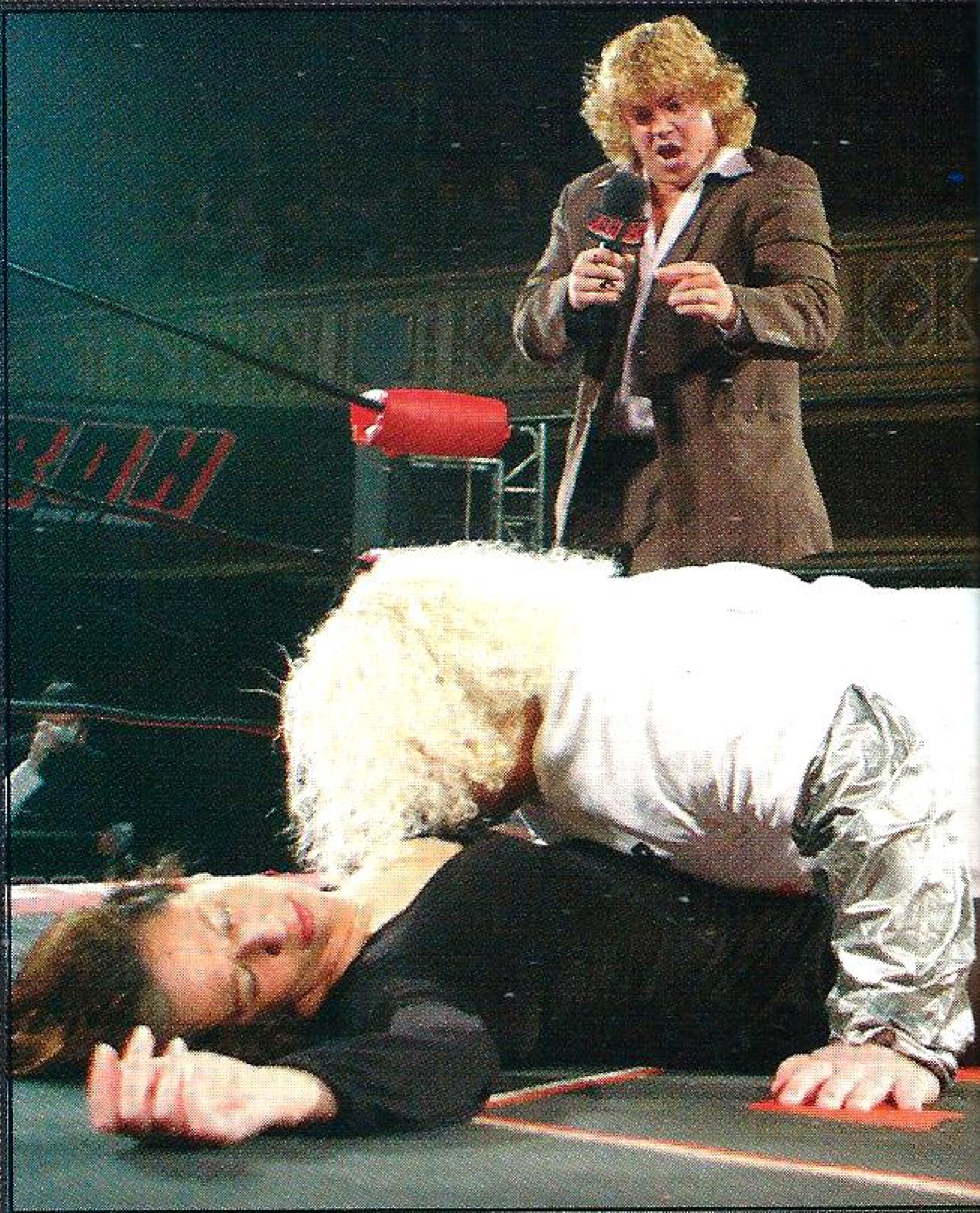
It happened at ROH's Sixth Anniversary Show, held in New York City's Manhattan Center. Larry Sweeney came to the ring accompanied by sympathetic whipping boy Bobby Dempsey to host an interview segment. Sweeney's guest that night was ROH women's wrestler Allison Danger.

While the New York fans made certain to give Danger the respect she had earned, Sweet & Sour Inc.'s brash leader did anything but, berating Danger and accusing her of having a reputation for making time with every male wrestler in the locker room.

Rightfully offended by Sweeney's remarks, Danger told Sweeney off and tried to leave the ring. In retaliation, Sweeney knocked her out with his microphone. With Danger lying motionless on the mat, Sweeney ordered Dempsey to "be a man" and have his way with her. When Dempsey appeared apprehensive, Sweeney knocked him out as well, and pushed him on top of her. Without going into graphic detail, the incident came to be known as "the simulated rape angle."

Some fans in attendance took the segment as over-the-top, yet harmless comedy. But many others were not nearly as amused, shaking their heads from the stands in shock and dismay at what they had just witnessed. Was this Ring of Honor or Vince Russo's WWF Attitude Era at its worst?

News of the incident immediately spread throughout the wrestling community. Apparently realizing the seriousness of the situation, ROH booker Gabe Sapolsky issued a prompt apology and announced that the segment would not be included in the DVD release of the event.


Nothing honorable about Sweeney

But as the incident became folklore over the Internet and more fans began talking about it, ROH officials bought into the old adage of there being no such thing as bad publicity. They re-thought the decision not to include the segment on the DVD, reasoning that fans should be allowed to make up their own minds by watching it themselves.

While including the segment may have helped sell a few extra DVDs, it's difficult to believe the short-term reward was worth the stain left on a promotion that has otherwise stayed out of the gutter. In fact, while ROH officials may deserve the benefit of the doubt when it comes to the decision to go through with the poorly conceived segment, their decision to cash in on the controversy—even after acknowledging its tastelessness—is hard to justify.

TURNBUCKLE TURKEY
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Photo by Joe Zanolle

THE SANDMAN

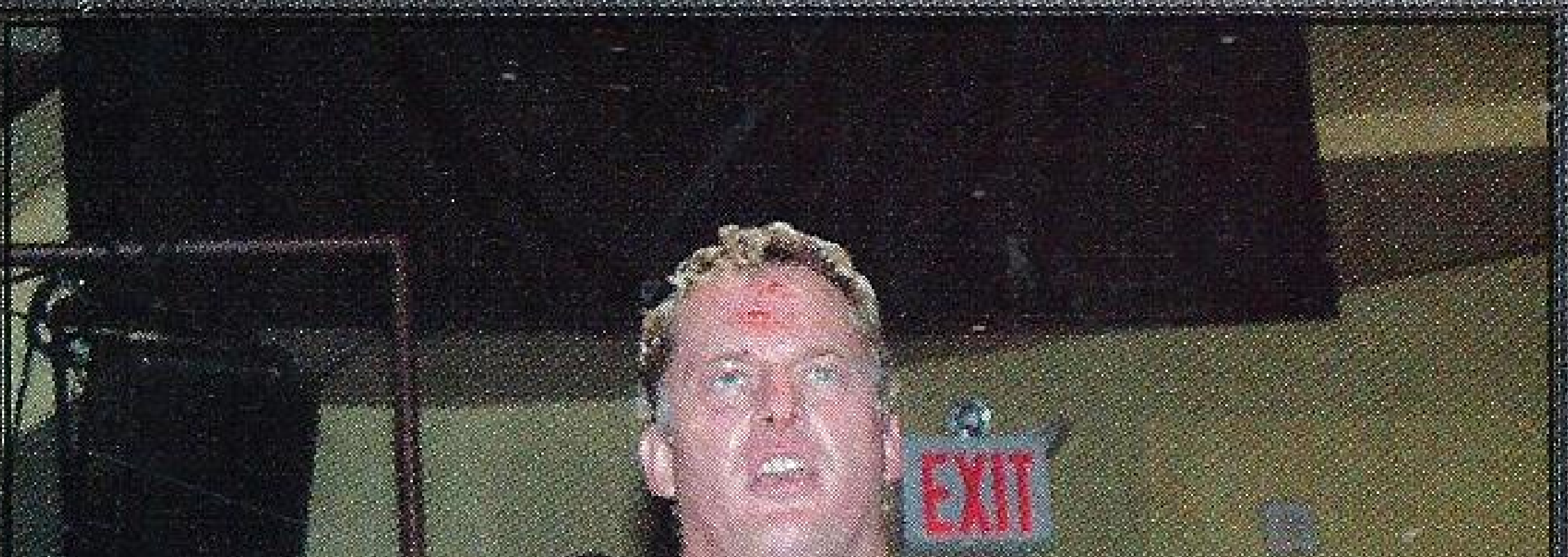
The legendary Terry Funk has said on many occasions that the key to developing a successful wrestling character is to take your natural personality and then magnify it 1,000 times.

But the wrestling persona of James "The Sandman" Fullington—the Singapore cane-wielding, chain-smoking, beer-guzzling, goofy brawler—has never been that far removed from his real lifestyle. Magnifying his persona, even 10 times, could be disastrous.

Unpolished and uncouth as he may be, Sandman gained a loyal following in the original ECW. He had a difficult start in life and has spent years battling personal problems, but is widely considered one of the business' most likable people—except when he drinks too much, in which case he can become an unpredictable wild man with a hair-trigger temper.

When he was hired by WWE during its early revival of ECW, no one expected Sandman to last as long as he did. But he stayed on his best behavior and once again became an unlikely hero. That is until his old demons returned and he was released from WWE after a confrontation with a road agent.

After his release, Sandman made mainstream headlines for all the wrong reasons. While attending a 75th birthday party at La Lanterna, a quiet upscale restaurant in Yonkers, New York, for one of wrestling's most celebrated wild men, Capt. Lou Albano, Fullington got into an argument with the restaurant's owner.



Went all ECW at Capt. Lou's party

The confrontation rapidly spiraled out of control, as the heavily intoxicated Sandman went into the kitchen and began flinging glasses at the owner and restaurant employees. The wrestler, who had gotten hit in the face with a bottle thrown by the owner, continued his rampage after police arrived on the scene. He started throwing glasses at the officers, until he was finally subdued and arrested. By the time Fullington was brought down, five uniformed officers and a SWAT team had been called to put an end to the brawl.

The whole affair would have been funny—it certainly sounds like something out of vintage ECW—if it weren't so disappointing after Fullington's efforts to separate his out-of-the-ring life from his drunk-and-ready Sandman persona.

The story made front-page news in the *New York Post* and video of his arrest hit the TV news. Fullington was arraigned and ordered to undergo psychiatric evaluation. Meanwhile, he was denied bail because of two felony robbery convictions in 1983 and previous DUI and reckless driving charges on his rap sheet. He was finally released on $10,000 bail and is awaiting trial as of publication.

TURNBUCKLE TURKEY 2008 AWARDS

Photo by George Napolitano

Mickie Knuckles

Injuries are as much a part of professional wrestling as, well, rings, ropes, and the mat itself. It is a physical, often violent industry, and there can be no denying the sacrifices these athletes make when they step into the squared circle, literally putting their careers on the line in every match.

Entertaining the fans is—or at least should be—the top priority of any performer. But there have to be limits—a point when common sense wins out over foolish risk-taking and the daredevil stunts that have become all too familiar on the independent scene.

Take the unfortunate, and totally avoidable, case of Mickie Knuckles.

For half a decade, the 24-year-old prized trainee of Ian Rotten scrapped, clawed, and bled her way into the hearts of fans in the Midwest. She tore her body apart in "Deathmatch" tournaments, exchanged blows with male wrestlers in hardcore matches, and suffered more physical punishment than perhaps any female wrestler ever has on this continent.

Her hard work was rewarded earlier this year, when officials from TNA began to take notice. After a few trial runs, Knuckles was signed to a limited contract during the summer, and brought into the promotion under the moniker of "Moose."

In her first two matches on successive episodes of *Impact*, Knuckles scored huge victories over TNA staples ODB and Roxxi Laveaux. Her career appeared to be set to reach new heights, when, all of a sudden, it happened.

On July 6 in Joliet, Illinois, just two days after her televised win over Roxxi, Knuckles returned to her home promotion, IWA: Mid-South, to battle longtime rival Sara Del Rey in the main event of "Summertime Black & Blues."

Earlier in the show, Egotistico Fantastico performed a dive onto his opponent off a high platform near the announcer's table. Knuckles, in an attempt to pull off an even more daring feat, dove at Del Rey from an even higher point during their match. She wound up landing badly, with all of her weight coming down on her right leg.

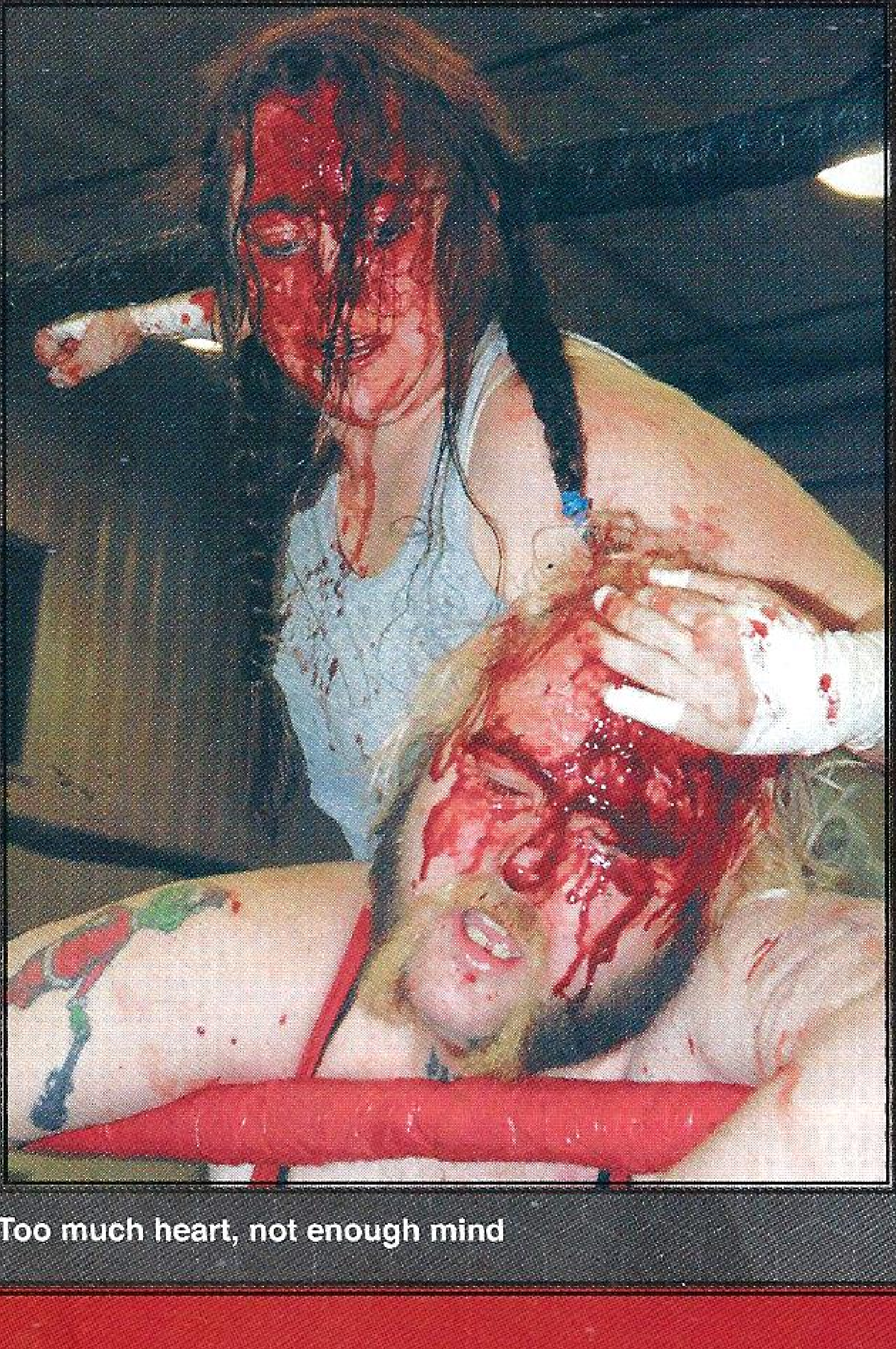
The result: a broken femur. The match was stopped immediately, thus ending the show flat. Knuckles was carted off in an ambulance. She required surgery the next day, and was informed she would be out of action for at least six months.

TNA officials were quick to note that Knuckles will be welcomed back to the promotion, and she is expected to fully recover from her injury. But there are no guarantees.

The match against Del Rey took place in front of a mere 60 fans in a high school gymnasium.

Knuckles, no doubt, decided to go all out to thank her fans. It is admirable that she would want to put on a show in what may have been one of her final appearances with the promotion, but the end result produced no winners.

Knuckles has severely stagnated her career by taking a dangerous and unnecessary risk. With any luck, the consequences of her action will serve as a reminder to other young, hungry independent talent that it is not essential to destroy your body to entertain the fans.



Too much heart, not enough mind

TURNBUCKLE TURKEY
2008
AWARDS
BOONDOX

Photo by Buddy Lamantia

VINCE McMAHON

Fifteen months after it happened, we're still wondering why the unthinkable Chris Benoit double-murder/suicide happened at all. We've all heard the same open-ended conclusions time and again since that horrific weekend in suburban Atlanta in June 2007.

It's true that we'll never know exactly what took place in the Benoit home, only that by the time police got into the house, Nancy and Daniel Benoit had been murdered, and their killer, Chris Benoit, had hung himself.

Steroids likely played some role in this horrific chain of events, but we're not sure exactly what or how big of a role. But if something is done about the steroid problem in wrestling, all of sports, and all of society as an ultimate result of the Benoit tragedy, that's a good thing.

Whether he wants the spot or not, WWE Chairman Vince McMahon is the gatekeeper of professional wrestling—the heart and soul of the sport. Along with all the success he has enjoyed should come some humbling responsibility to do right by the men and women who work in the industry now, and those who will work in it in the years to come.

So when Congress decided it needed to take a hard look at the steroid problem back in February, it rightfully invited Vince McMahon to testify before the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection.

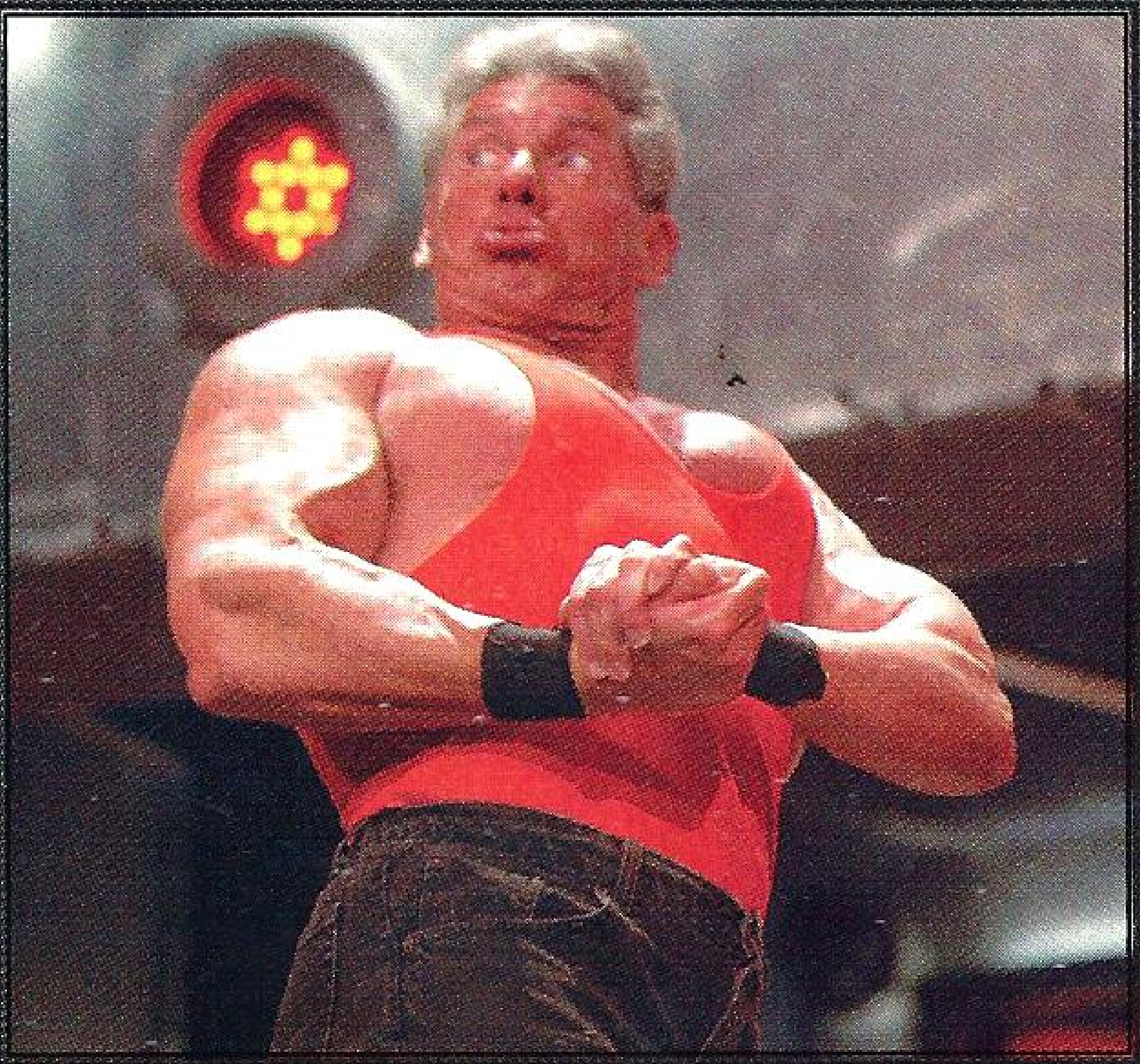
Sorry, he was busy that day.

Actually, his attorney, Jerry McDevitt was busy in a criminal trial in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Hey, we can relate. Our own publisher, Stu Saks, was recently invited to the White House to personally brief President George W. Bush on the difficulties of publishing magazines during a recession, but he had to mow the lawn that day.

All kidding aside, this is a very serious issue. Steroids have killed a lot of people, and something must be done about that. Kudos to McMahon and WWE for implementing its strict Wellness Policy and for taking action against those wrestlers who violate it. Jeff Hardy and William Regal have both been suspended twice for drug violations. Several others have been suspended once.

But McMahon was the only invited witness to turn down Congress ... all because his lawyer had other obligations. What, he didn't think the judge in that criminal case would have held up that trial for a day if it meant helping out Congress? Think of the insight McMahon could have provided. He might have even helped put Congress on the road to finding a solution.



No time for Congress

Rep. Lee Terry (R-NE), accused McMahon of "flipping his finger" at Congress.

McMahon responded by issuing a statement in which he said he declined the request to testify more than a month earlier and heard nothing further from Congress until the hearing.

"Any suggestion made today by members of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce that I or my organization, WWE, have been uncooperative or that I have in any way 'flipped [my] finger' at the Committee by not accepting its invitation to testify today is inaccurate and unfair," read the statement. "The WWE has provided over 3,000 pages of documents and cooperated with all requests from the Committee, as we have with similar requests from the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee."

Subcommittee Chairman Bobby Rush added he was "exceptionally and extremely disappointed" that the WWE chairman hadn't made it to Capitol Hill.

The entire wrestling community couldn't help feeling the same way.

TURNBUCKLE TURKEY 2008 AWARDS

world wrestling entertainment

Photo by George Napolitano

HULK HOGAN

Okay, lets start by rolling out a few easy lines:

Looks like Hogan doesn't really know best after all.

It won't be a very happy Thanksgiving for the Hogans this year.

All those little "Hulksters" out there probably aren't looking up to the man with the 24-inch pythons anymore.

Hulk Hogan and his family found out in a big way last year, reality really does bite.

We could use this space to tear the stuffing out of a family of turkeys for any number of trivial reasons. The messy Hulk-Linda divorce. The fact that Linda has been spotted with a guy who might be too young for her daughter, Brooke. That Brooke seems to come off more air-headed with every word she speaks or blogs.

Oh, and what about that infamous photo of Hulk applying suntan oil to his bikini-clad daughter? If you haven't seen that, we'll just tell you that if he was aiming for her back, he came in a bit low. No, Hulk, that didn't creep us out. Not at all.

But the reason Hogan gets a Turnbuckle Turkey Award in 2008 has everything to do with a tragedy.

Last November, his son Nick, 17, was racing his father's sports car in Florida when the car hit a curb and slammed into a palm tree. Nick's friend, John Graziano, a passenger who was not wearing a seat belt, was seriously injured to the point at which he'll likely spend the rest of his life in a vegetative state. The car was estimated to have been traveling at 69 miles per hour. Just weeks earlier, Nick was cited for driving 82 miles per hour. This time, alcohol was in his system.

Nick pleaded no contest to felony reckless driving charges. The Grazianos, though they would file a civil suit against Hulk and Linda, asked for leniency for Nick, and got it—he was sentenced to just eight months in county jail.

So with Nick languishing in jail and, we had all hoped, feeling remorseful and contrite and maybe, just maybe, growing up a little and learning from a horrible lapse in judgment, an audio clip of phone conversations he had with his parents while serving his sentence leaked to the press.

Remorse? Hardly. Try sickening. Some excerpts ...

HULK: I don't know what type of person John was or what he did to get himself in the situation. I know he was pretty aggressive and used to yell at people and used to do stuff. For some reason, man, God laid some heavy [expletive] on that kid, man. I don't know what he was into.

NICK: John was a negative person.

And instead of finding some constructive use of his time behind bars, Nick is ... thinking reality TV?

NICK: Will you work on that reality deal for me and get that thing lined up so the minute I walk out of wherever I walk out of, it's there, boom?

HULK: Can you do it while you're on probation?

NICK: Yes. Of course ... I want to do it where I'll make the most money.

There is more tape of Nick complaining and even Linda ripping Graziano's mother, insisting Linda is the one truly suffering in this mess.

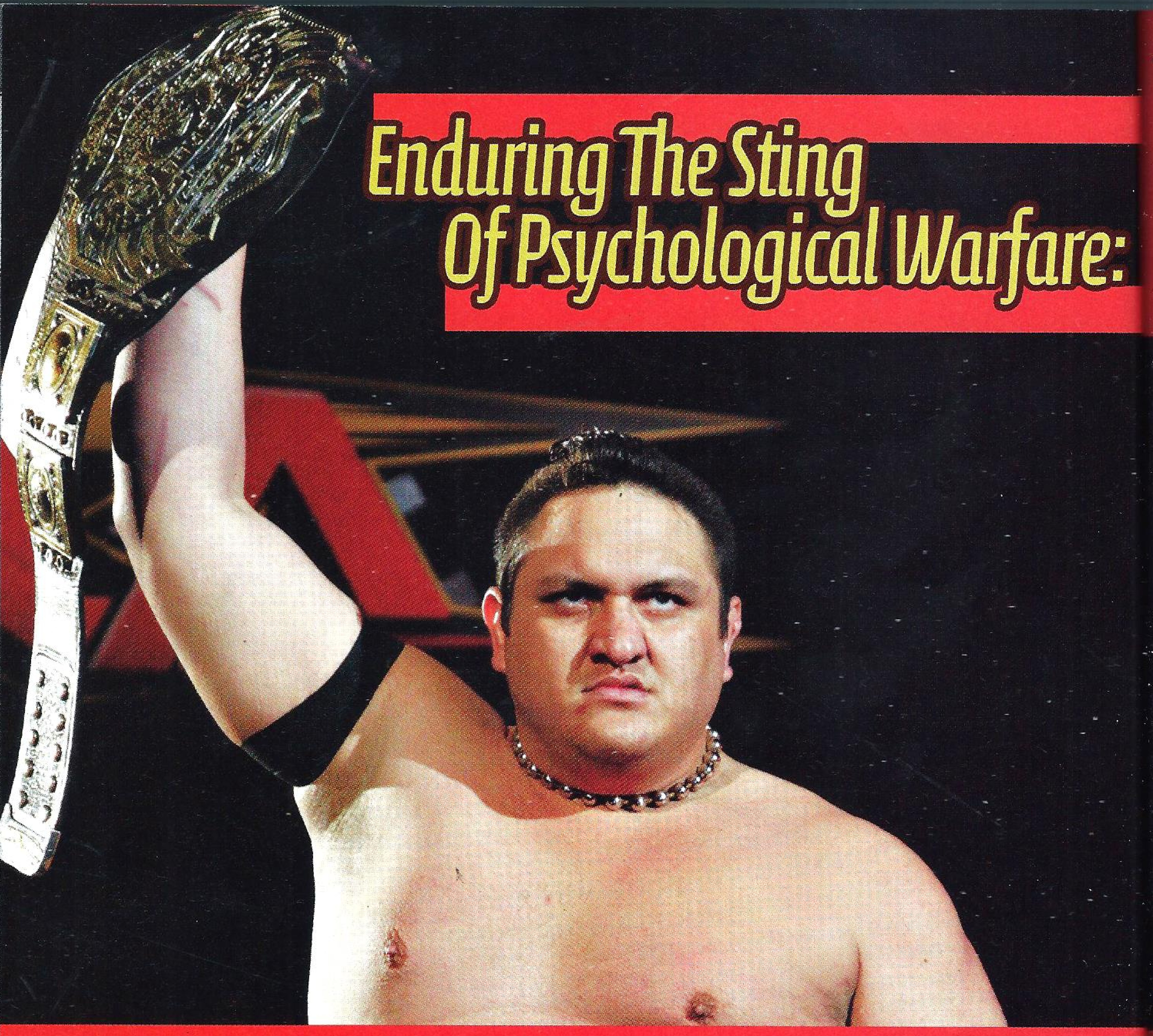
After these tapes were played ad nauseam on various TV shows, Hulk went into full damage control mode, looking contrite and humble as he appeared on CNN's *Larry King Live*.

It was a losing battle. A sad, pathetic, losing battle for all involved.

Does Hogan *still* know best?

TURNBUCKLE TURKEY 2008 AWARDS

Enduring The Sting Of Psychological Warfare:



IS SAMOA READY TO

JOE CRACK?

Whether he's in the ring or not, Samoa Joe keeps one eye on the rafters in anticipation of thwarting an attack by Sting. How long can the TNA World champion maintain such vigilance before he snaps?

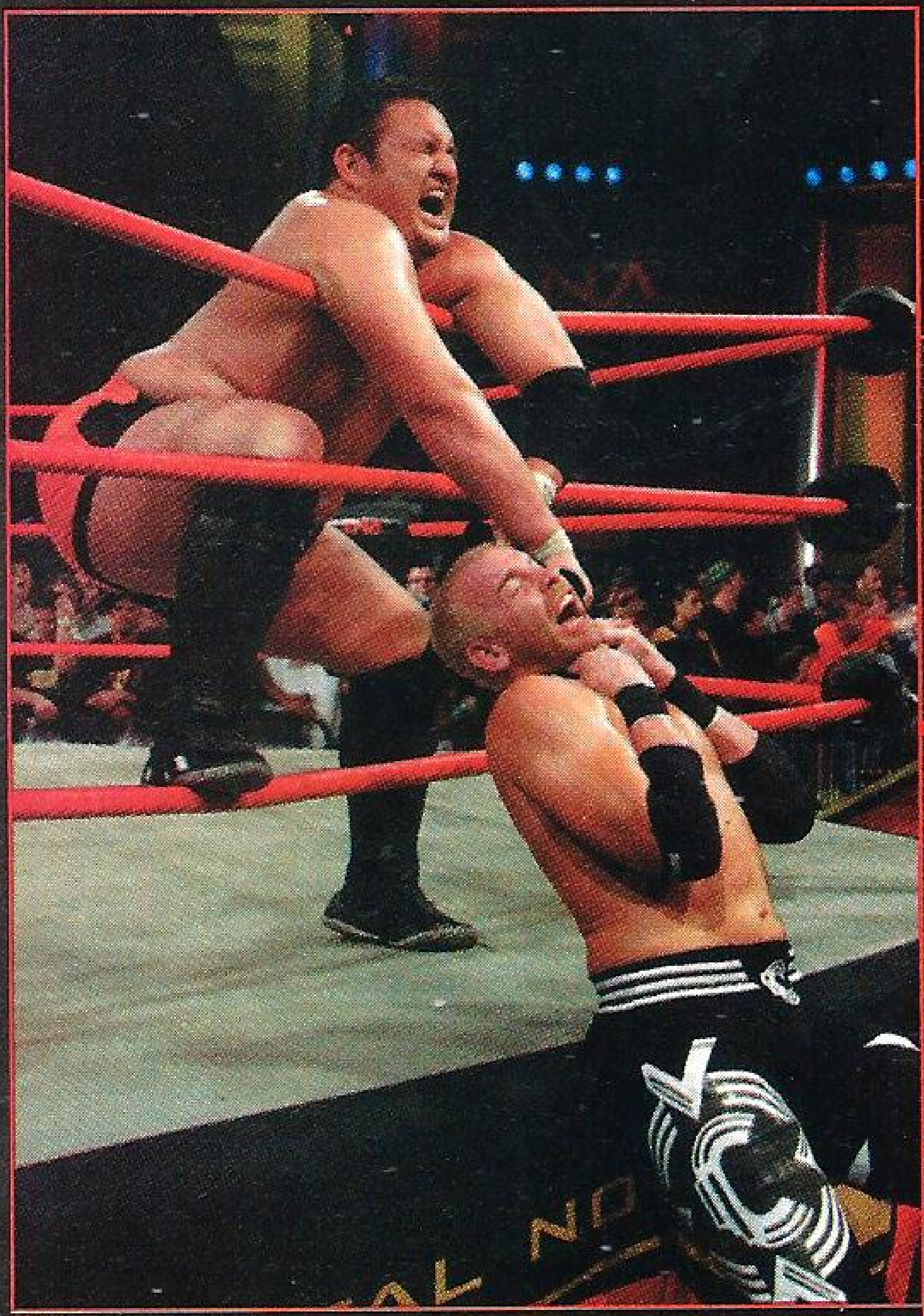
By Bill Meltzer
Photos By Lee South/TNA Wrestling

TNA WORLD CHAMPION Samoa Joe may not have lost his smile, a la Shawn Michaels, but that's only because Joe never smiles much, anyway—at least not within the confines of the Impact Zone. He's always been an intense and often brutal competitor in the ring.

Even when he's cheered by the fans, Joe enjoys inflicting punishment, and has never been afraid to be on the receiving end of a heavy shot if it means getting in a devastating kick, chop, punch, or slam of his own. Of late, however, there's been a decided change that has come over the "Samoan Submission Machine," and it has everything to do with the gold belt around his waist.

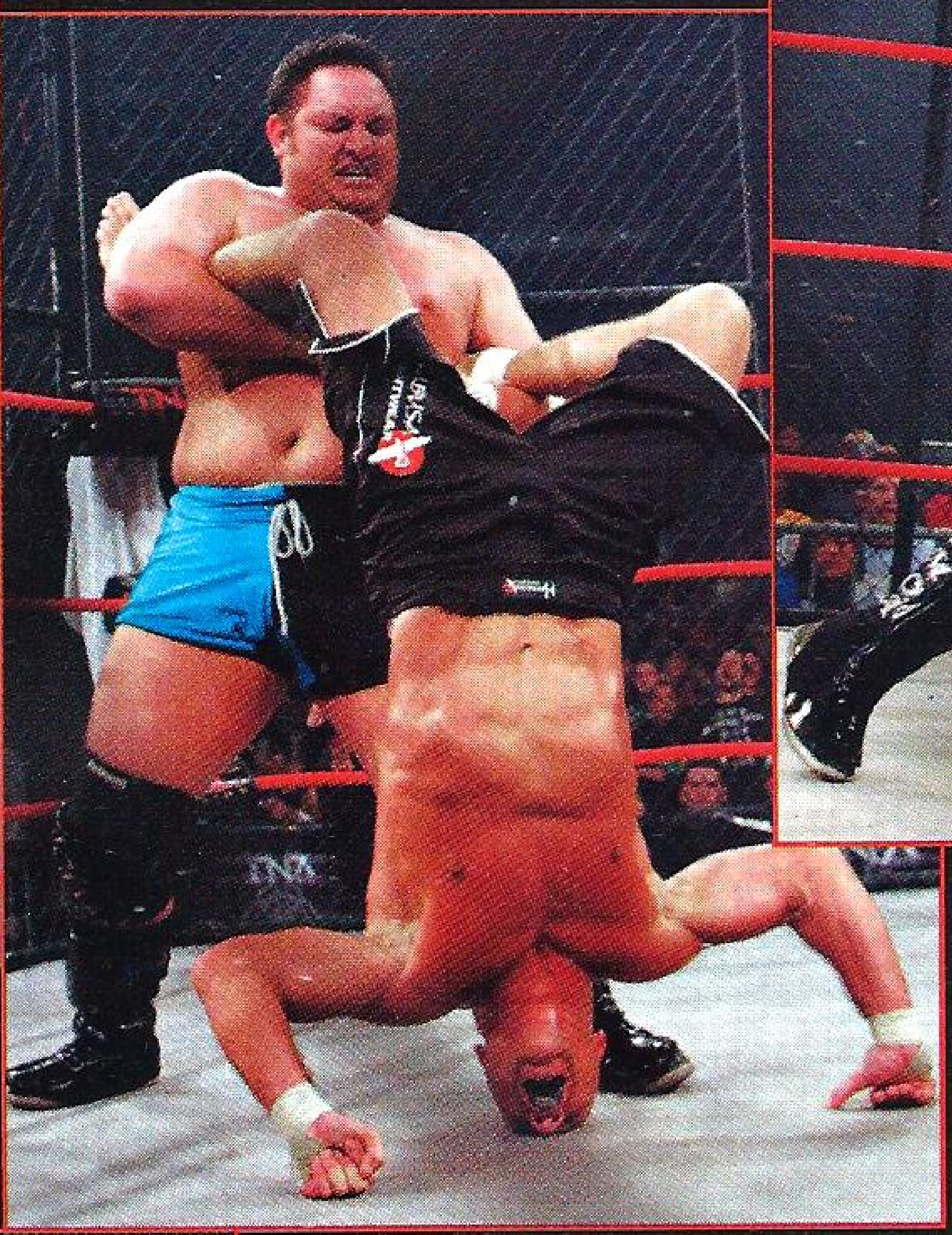
For all of his no-nonsense fury in the ring, he's always been very calculating in his approach to every match—letting up just enough to avoid disqualifications or suspensions. In promos, he usually accomplishes more with his infamous smoldering death stare than others do with a dozen shouted threats. This sense of calm inside of a monster has always made Joe one of the toughest competitors in the sport.

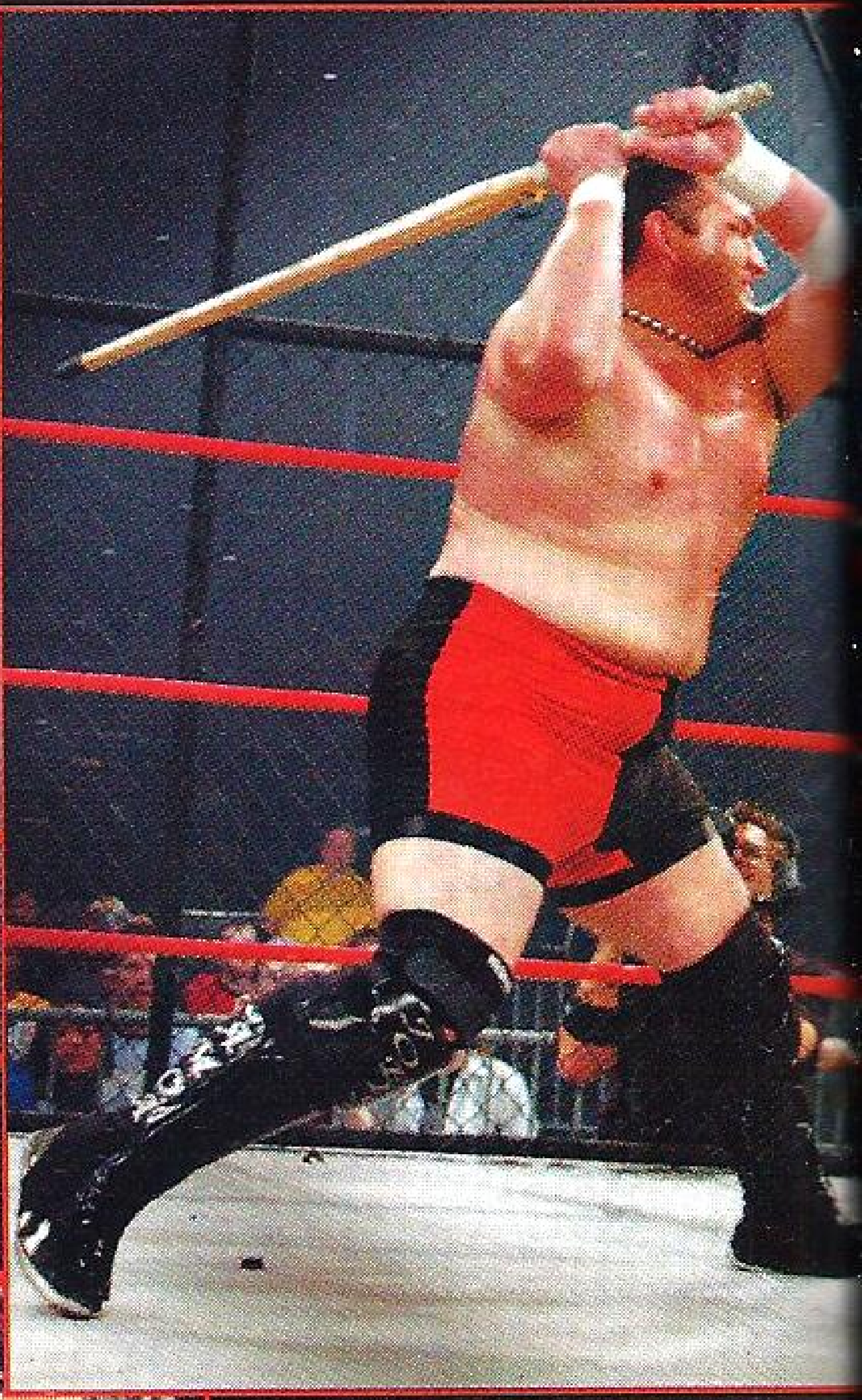
That's why it's been shocking to watch how Joe has seemingly come unglued now that he's accomplished his goal of establishing himself as the man to beat in TNA. Why



Always one to favor a stiff style in the ring, Samoa Joe has recently turned up the aggression against opponents such as Christian Cage for no apparent reason. Perhaps Sting's recent sneak-attacks have taken their toll on Joe's psyche.

While recent signs might suggest Joe is headed for a breakdown, Sting's attacks have not affected Joe's wrestling ability. To fend off the competition, Joe will need to be at his technical best, as he was when he defeated Kurt Angle at Lockdown for the TNA World title.

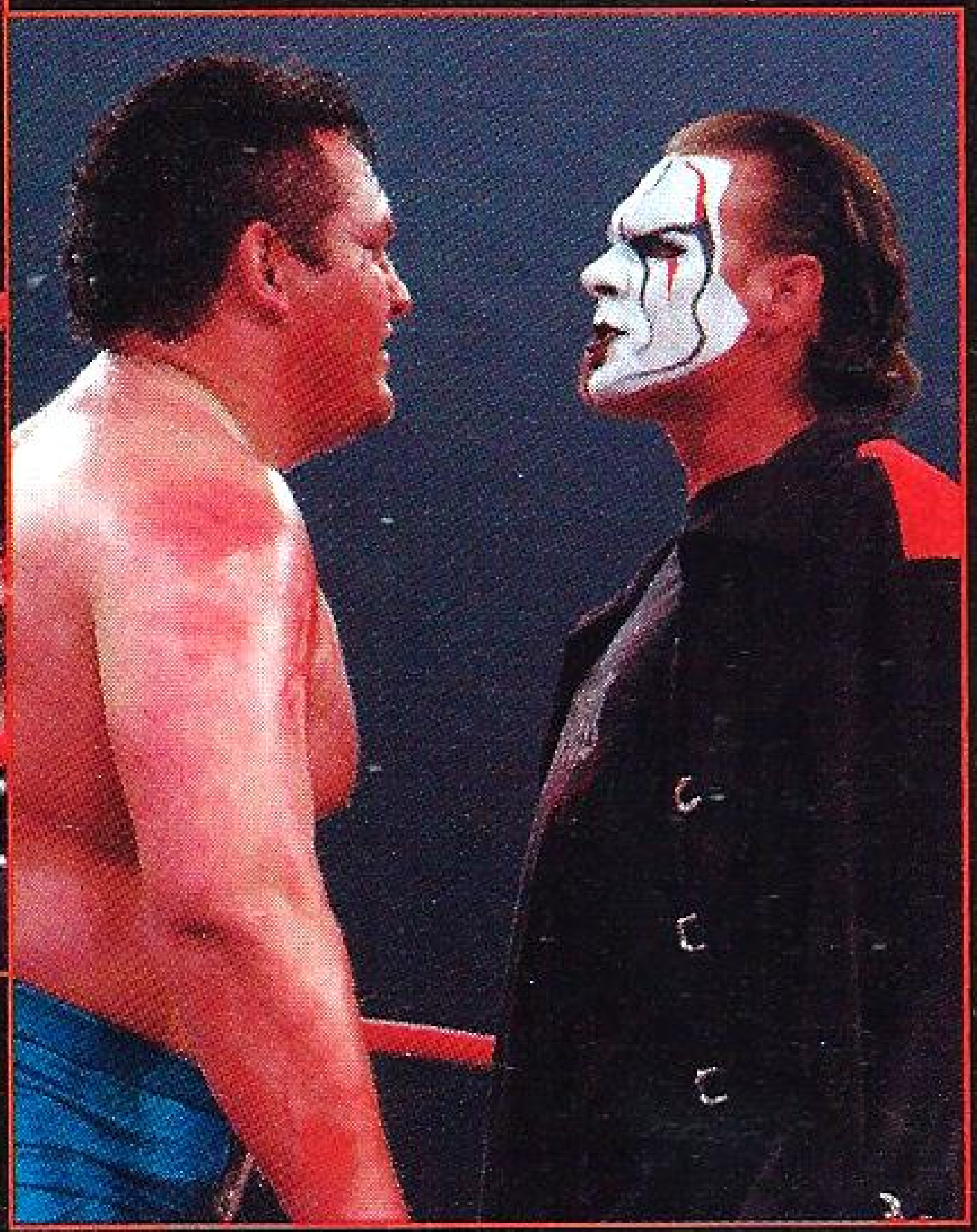




Motivated by a title defense, revenge, and Sting's antics, Joe used every weapon at his disposal to unleash his frustration on Booker T in their "Six Sides Of Steel" match at Hard Justice. This time, though, Joe's brutality was legal and necessary.

Joe's recent mauling of Booker T was considered beyond the pale, even by his most ardent fans. At some point, proving his invincibility could prevent Joe from successfully defending his World title.

Confronting Sting one-on-one in the ring would go a long way in settling Samoa Joe's nerves. But as long as "The Stinger" evades Joe's grasp, the champion will remain on edge.



would the champion mess with success, unless the pressure is getting to him?

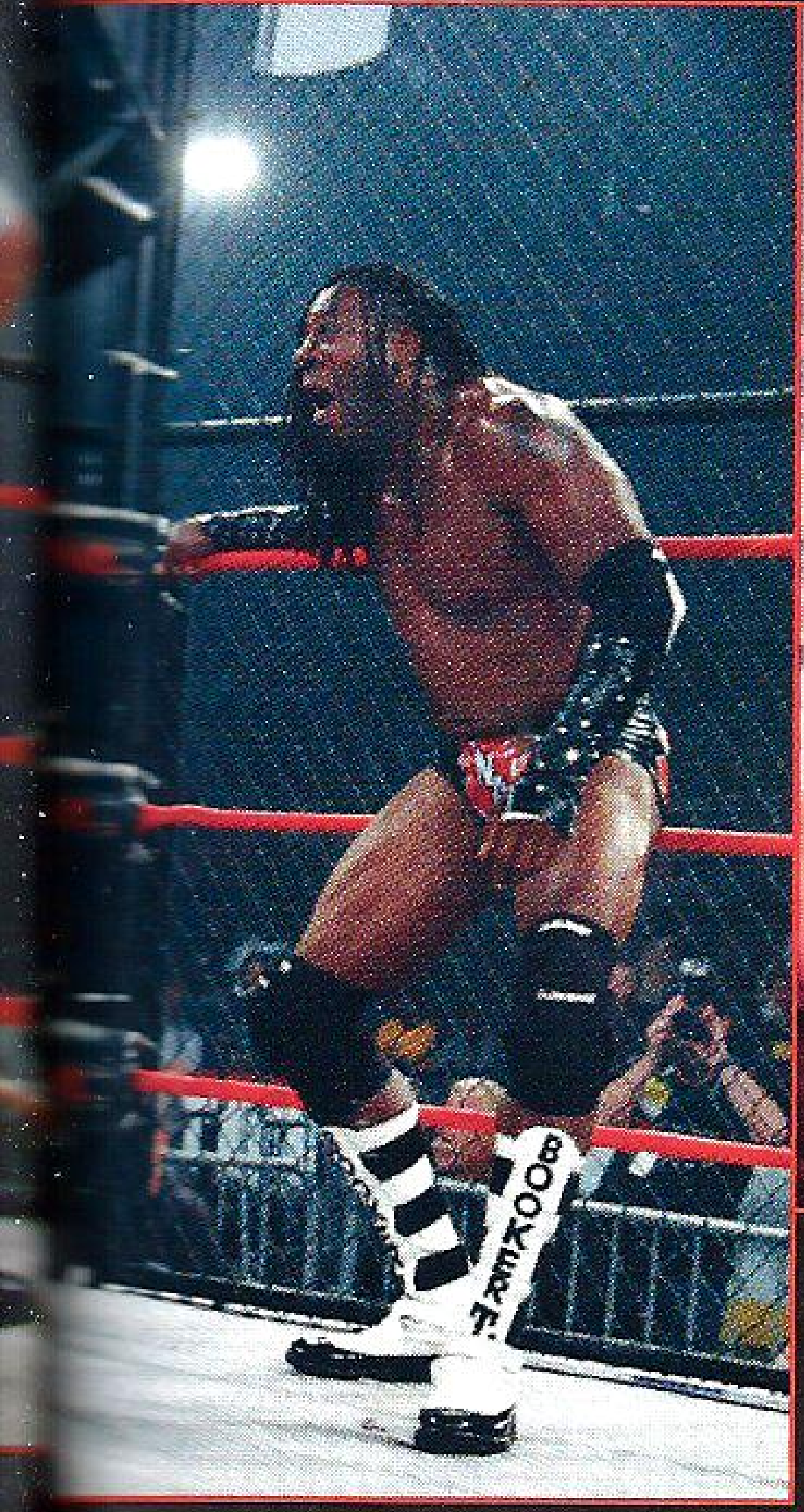
Mick Foley, himself a former world champion who is no stranger to brutal brawls, thinks he knows the answer.

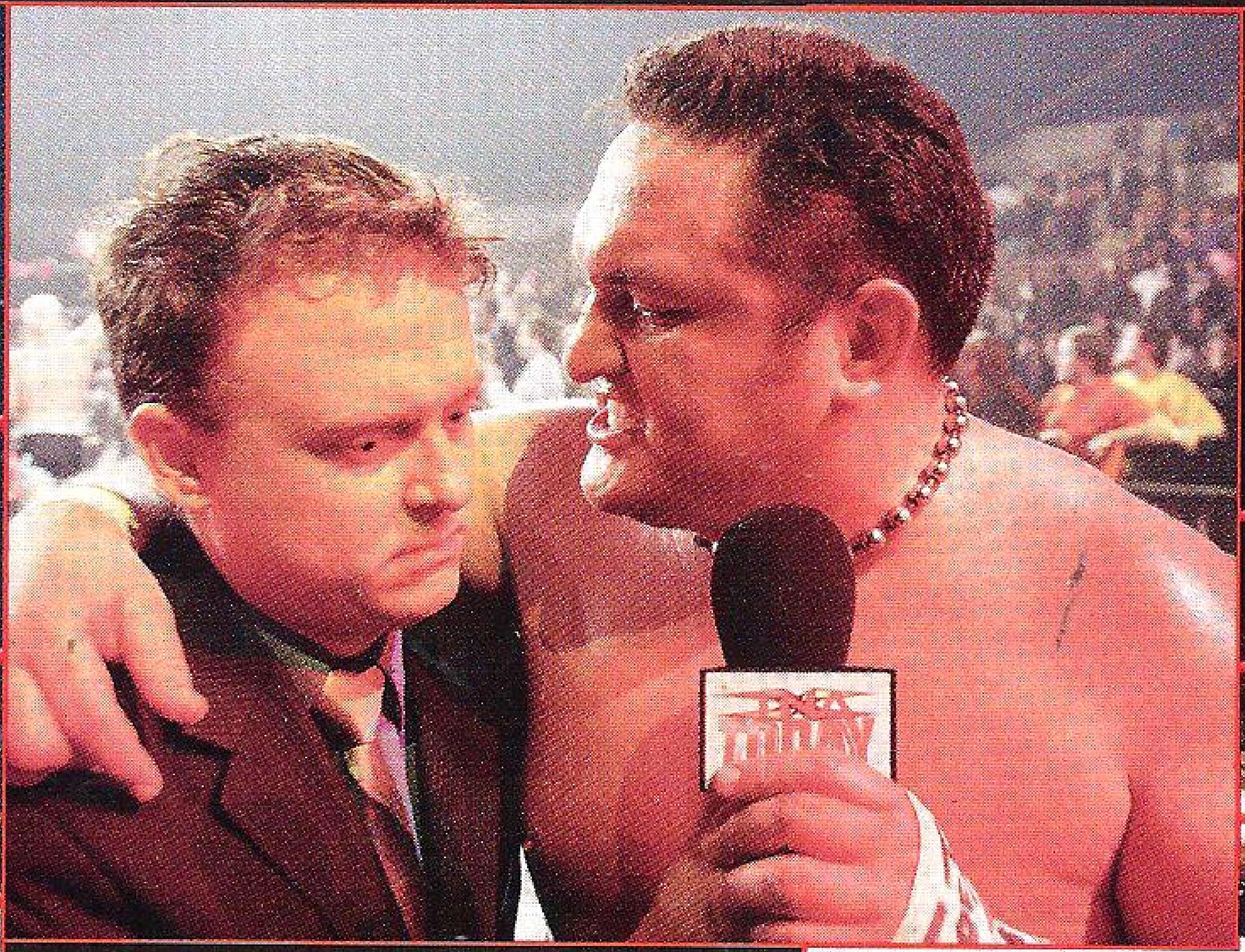
"It's a whole different ballgame going from hunter to the hunted," Foley says. "Suddenly, everyone is gunning for you. You're not sure who to trust. If you get attacked and someone rushes in to help you, is that guy doing it because he really wants to help? Or is it because he wants to be the one to take you out? I haven't talked to Samoa Joe about it, but I'm almost certain he's going through some of that."

Foley may be onto something. TNA's crop of challengers is the deepest it has been in federation history. It includes a host of former TNA, NWA, WCW, and WWE champions with varying reputations for treachery and violence.

But, it's not just the fact that Joe is champion that seems to be bringing him out of his usually collected self. In the recent months, Joe has been brought down in various matches by the dark and brooding Sting. Now that Sting is back in the picture, his mental warfare seems to be working.

The strain is showing, as Joe has slowly begun to lose control of his emotions. In the ring, his style





As TNA commentator Jeremy Borash knows, Joe can be as intense an interview as he is a wrestler. Borash and other TNA personnel have noticed the increased tension in Samoa Joe's demeanor recently.

Properly channeled aggression has allowed Joe to rise above other dangerous men in TNA like Scott Steiner. But the uncontrolled rage he's exhibiting now could destroy his title reign and his career. Joe must find a way to keep his emotions in check.

is showing an increasing amount of recklessness—even desperation. In his promos, the veins on his neck bulge as he rants at his enemies.

"Despite his unusual agility for such a big guy, Joe's always been more Stan Hansen than Big Van Vader in his approach," says Foley. "Hansen could intimidate the hell out of you because he was so methodical and relentless. Vader was a guy who could get reckless and throw any sort of game plan out the window.

"But, Joe seems to be leaning more toward the Vader side of wrestling. These mind games Sting has been playing with him seem to be working on him pretty well. It's hard enough being champion without someone always turning the lights out and beating you with a baseball bat."

TNA Management Director Jim Cornette also sees a similarity between Joe's current in-ring behavior and Vader's lunacy during his three tenures atop WCW. He even says the strain of being champion could be affecting Joe away from the ring.

"The other day, I asked Joe, 'What time is it?' He slapped his chest beet red and screamed, 'It's Samoa time!'

"Joe is normally a real laid-back, funny guy when he's away from the ring. He's not usually uptight at all. Lately, he's been very serious and subdued away from the ring. I told him to relax and have fun being champion. He's worked hard to get where he's at."

For his part, Joe doesn't seem to understand why there's so much consternation about him taking an even more aggressive approach in the ring. He also denies that the pressure is getting to him. Instead, he points the finger at the tactics of his opposition.

"I call it being proactive," Joe says. "I understand that there's a target on my back now, but I'm not the least bit worried about it. I'm sending a message to make it clear to everyone in TNA that the World championship is my property. I don't take kindly to people trying to beat me up and take my property. Call me crazy."

Despite his protests to the contrary, as the number of challengers has mounted and unlikely alliances have formed to take Joe out, the champion's actions have seemed increasingly reactive. Joe appears to be looking over his shoulder constantly, waiting for someone to jump him from behind.

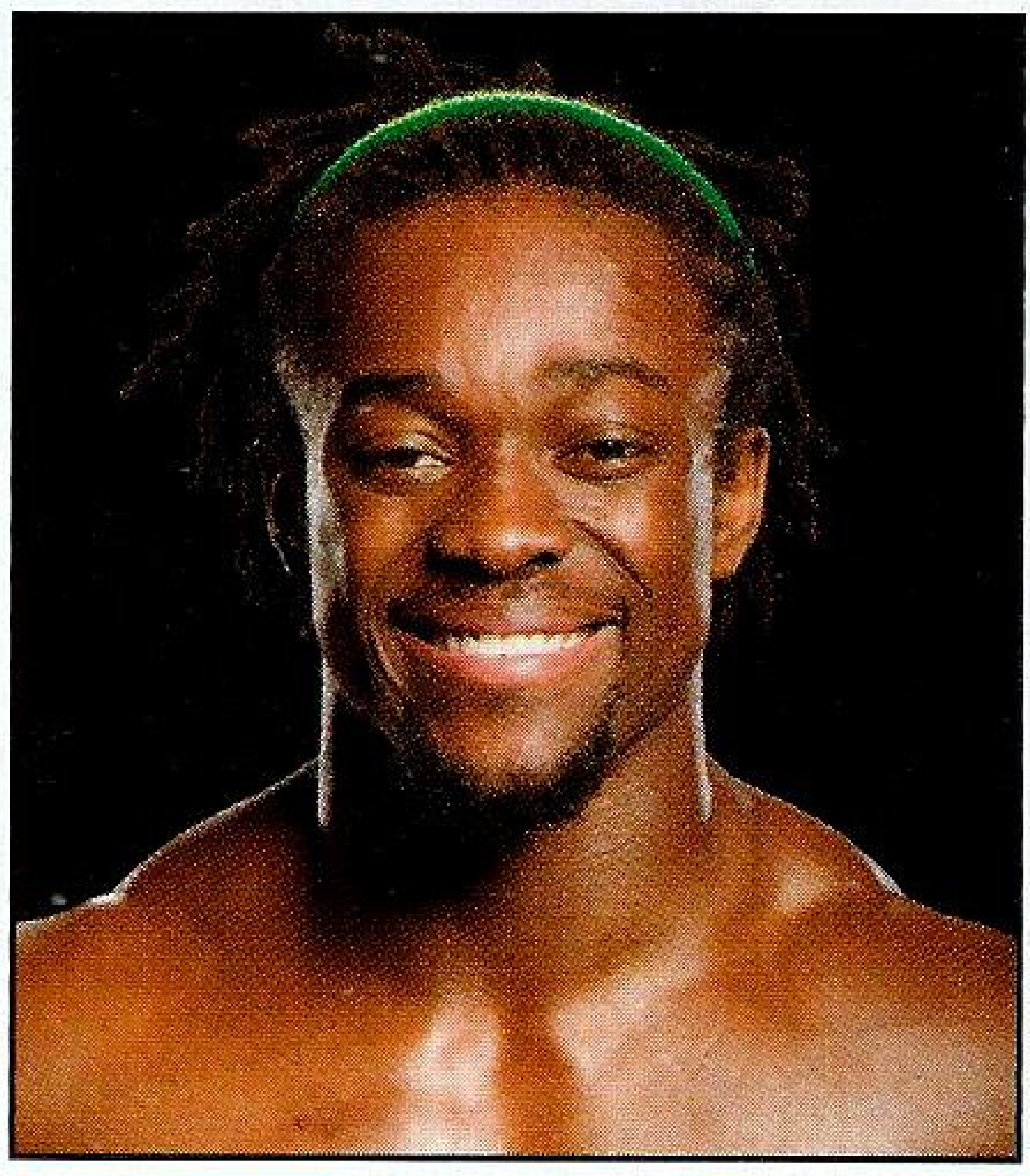
This shows just how Sting's initial attacks have opened up the eyes to the rest of TNA's roster. They now see that the champ can be flustered, even bothered, by guerilla attacks.

Even when there is no sneak-attack, the thought infuriates him and leads him to become violent to the point of being out of control. When there is an attack, Joe practically froths at the mouth trying to fight off his assailants. He spends a lot of time thinking about revenge against the likes of Booker T and Sting.

No one can say Samoa Joe isn't a fighting champion. But at the rate he's going, he's in danger of becoming an ex-champion sooner than he should. ☐

Kofi Kingston

"I know I still have to prove meself every time out"



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> **"The only pressure and expectations that matter are the ones you put on yourself. I realize t'ings aren't going to always go me way. There's a lot of really tough competition in WWE, and lots of t'ings can happen."**

FORMER WWE INTERCONTINENTAL champion Kofi Kingston has come a long way in a very short time in the wrestling business. After making his professional debut in 2005 and signing a WWE developmental contract the following year, he rose rapidly through Deep South and Florida Championship Wrestling, earning a promotion to the big time.

Kingston continued to fast track up the federation ladder, making a splash in ECW. Upon arrival on WWE's flagship Raw program, he promptly won the Intercontinental championship—which is still arguably the federation's most prestigious secondary title—from the much more experienced Chris Jericho.

Although his reign was relatively brief, Kingston was never pinned or forced to tap out when he lost the belt. He lost the title to Santino Marella in a special stipulations tag team match in which both the I-C title and the women's championship were on the line when Kingston and Mickie James took on Marella and Beth Phoenix.

Since then, Kingston has continued to sport an impressive win-loss record. But is it too much too soon? Despite the 26-year-old grappler's laid-back demeanor, the WWE's first Jamaican superstar says that his goal is to succeed for the long term. He has no intentions of being a flash-in-the-pan champion.

Kingston recently sat down with Contributing Writer Bill Meltzer to discuss his rapid ascent, his future goals, his intriguing background, and the image he wants to portray, both inside and outside the ring.

Q: Kofi, this is the first opportunity we've had to interview you on the "Hotseat." Let me thank you up front for your time and say congratulations on your success in ECW and Raw.

A: T'ank you. I'm glad to do it.

Q: Did you surprise even yourself with your rapid climb in the WWE? For someone who has only been a pro for three years—and has been on the WWE's main roster for less than a year—you've shown yourself to be surprisingly savvy in the ring.

A: I'm a little surprised, yeah. T'ings have fallen in place pretty fast, but I'm not going to let it get to me head. I'm learning something new in every match, and I know I still have to prove meself every time out. I know this is a cliché, and I'm sorry about that, but I really do take it one match at a time. Whether it's Shelton Benjamin, Chris Jericho, [Santino] Marella, or whoever, I can only focus on the guy I'm wrestling that night.

Q: But is there any added pressure or heightened expectations now that you've already got an Intercontinental championship reign to your credit? For some wrestlers, winning an early championship can quickly become a burden.

A: The only pressure and expectations that matter are the ones you put on yourself. I realize t'ings aren't going to always go me way. There's a lot of really tough competition in WWE, and lots of t'ings can happen. If I lose a few matches in a row, I can't panic or pout about it. Forget about it, stay positive, and believe in yourself. There's a Jamaican saying that goes, "All the fish stick easy if you catch." In other words, I know I've won the belt before, and I can do it again.

Photo by George Napolitano

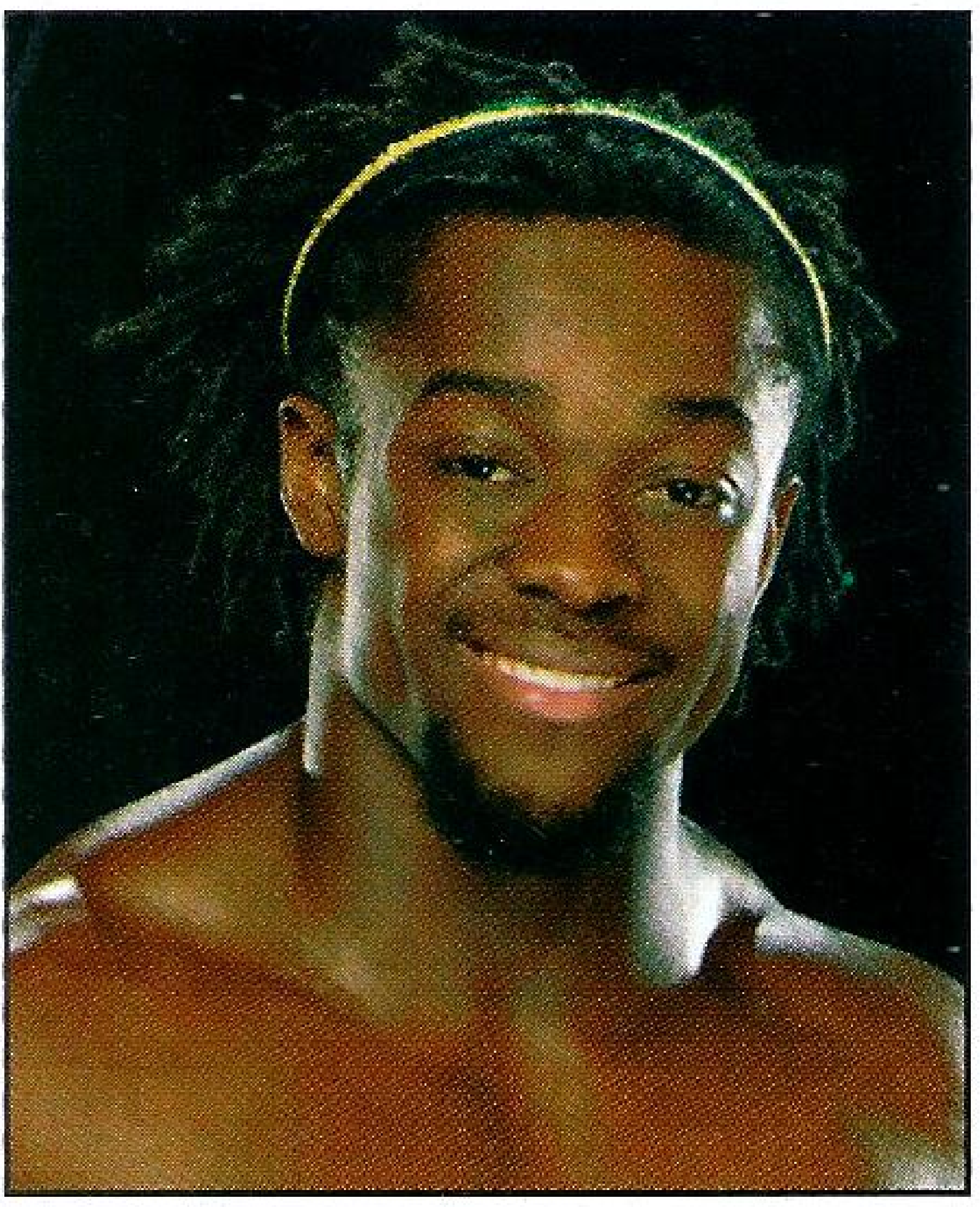

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Photo by George Napolitano0

Win or lose, Kingston considers each match a learning experience at this point—even those against comical opponents such as Marella, whom he can dominate.

> ***"Mickie James put her trust in me in the match to help her keep her title, the same as I trusted her."***

Q: Do you regret getting involved in the mixed tag match where you lost the belt, even though you weren't directly involved in the outcome?

A: No. First of all, I wasn't going to hold the Intercontinental belt forever, especially the first time around. Me attitude is that whether me first reign was one month, one year, or whatever, I only wanted to feel like I was better for having won the belt. The next time will be longer. Second, Mickie [James] put her trust in me in the match to help her keep her title, the same as I trusted her. And t'ird, there are a lot of special-stipulation title matches in WWE. It just goes with the turf.

Q: At 218 pounds, you are more or less a cruiserweight. The old wrestling conventional wisdom is that a good big man will always beat a good little man. Ideally, would you like to get your weight up to about, say, the 235-pound range?

A: Not as me main concern. I just want to keep me conditioning up and improve on me execution in the ring. It's not as important as it was a few years ago to be 250 pounds and up. I don't t'ink I could carry that without affecting me mobility in the ring, and that's me biggest strong point right now.

Q: Who has been your toughest opponent so far?

A: Well, getting in the ring with Chris Jericho, like him or not, was a t'rill and to win the I-C belt was a dream come true. Also, I don't particularly like some of the t'ings he does in the ring, but it was a great experience to wrestle Shelton Benjamin. He's a tremendous, and very underrated technician. Look, I've only got a problem with someone if he's got a problem with me. All I ask is respect from my opponents, not friendship. I give total respect to Benjamin, but it took me beating him several times until I got that respect back at all.

Q: Would you agree or disagree that WWE pretty much has three tiers in terms of its roster. There are the guys who can't even get on TV, or hardly get time on TV. Then there's a large pool of mid-card talent, where a lot of good wrestlers seem to get stuck. Finally, there's the small group of headliners—John Cena, Triple-H, Undertaker, Edge, and Batista—men like that.

A: Yeah, I'd agree with that. I assume your next question is what do I

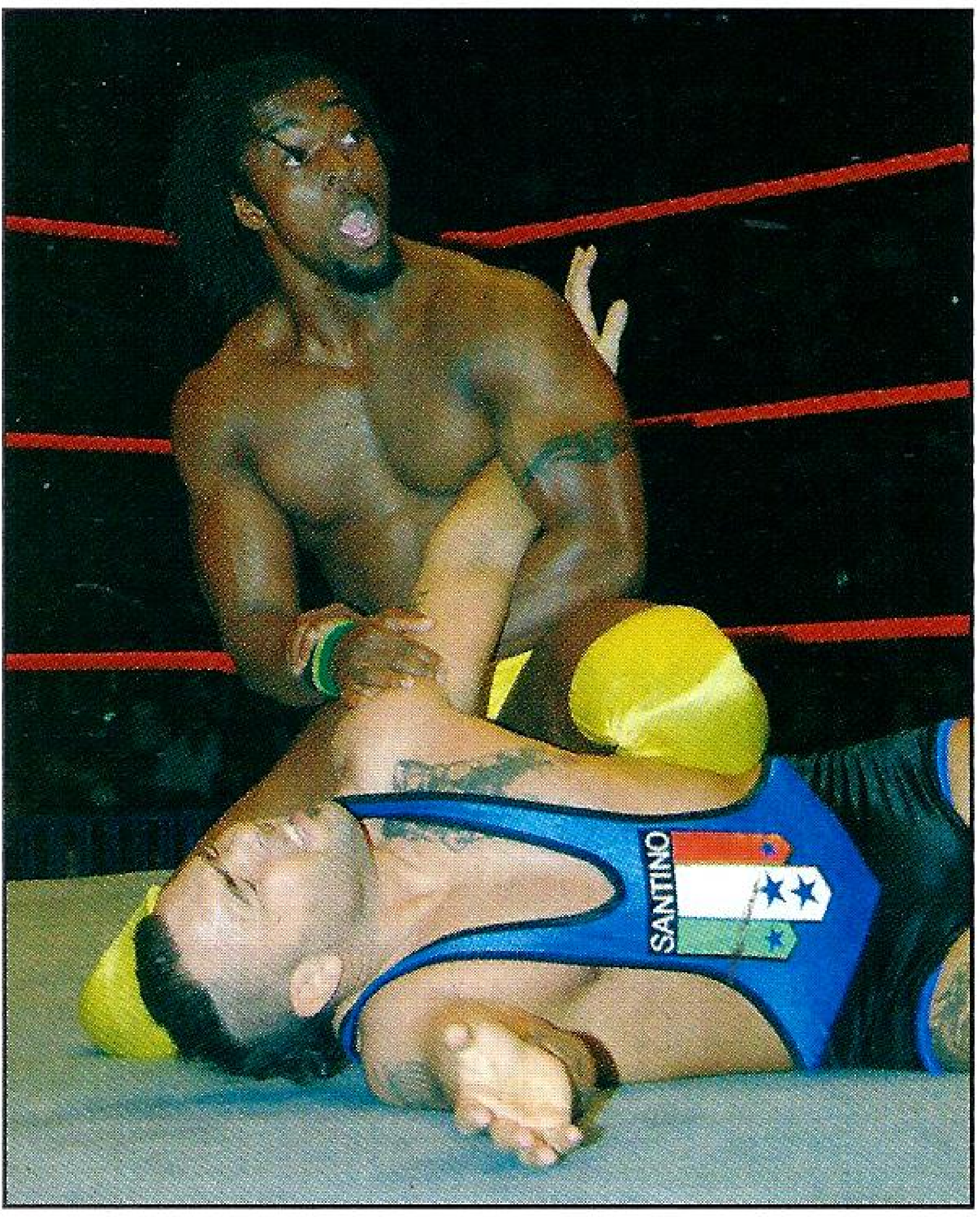
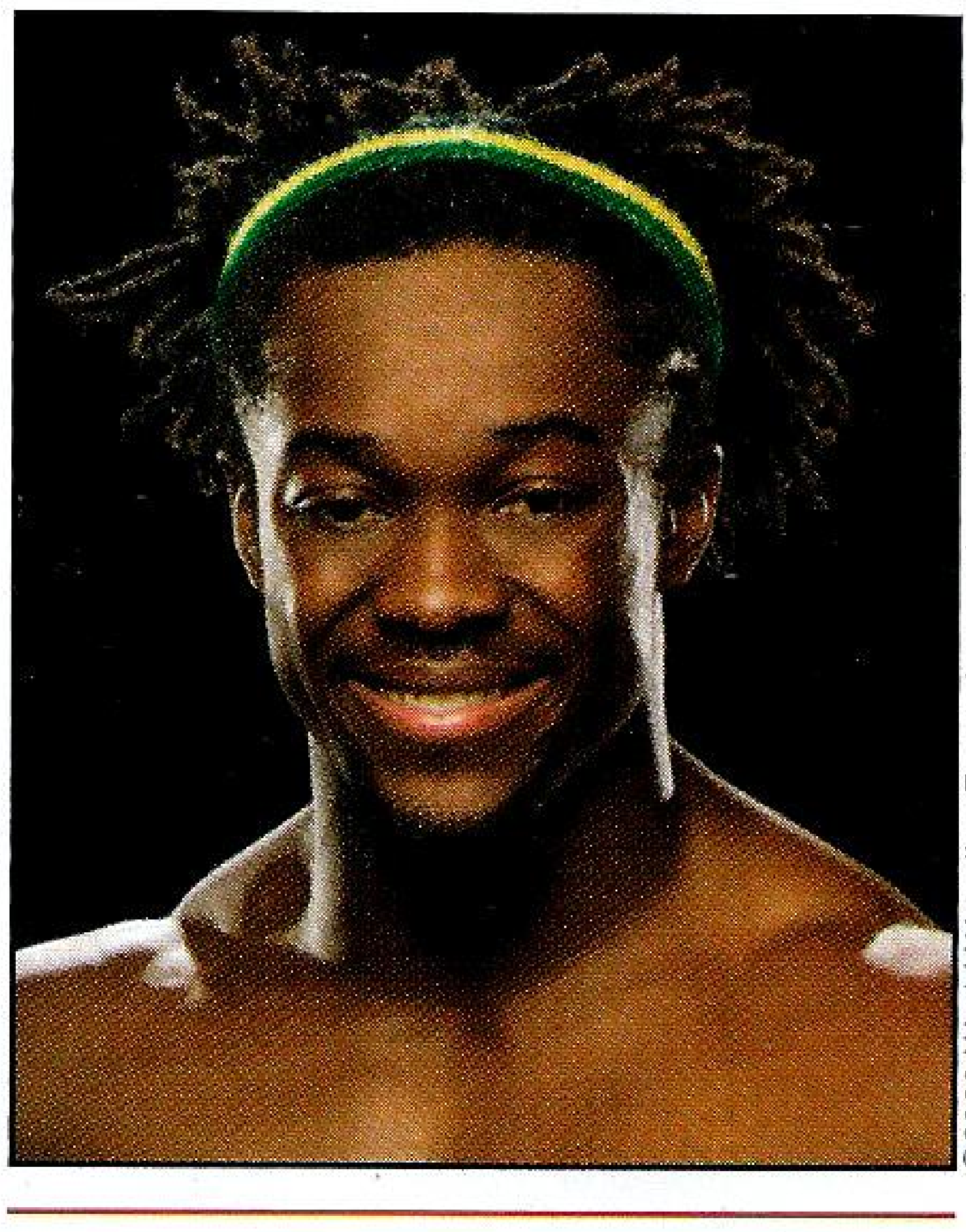


Photo By George Napolitano

Kofi Kingston outwrestled Santino Marella when they met at The Great American Bash, but lost the Intercontinental title on a technicality. The effervescent Jamaican is confident he can regain the strap.

Photo by George Napolitano



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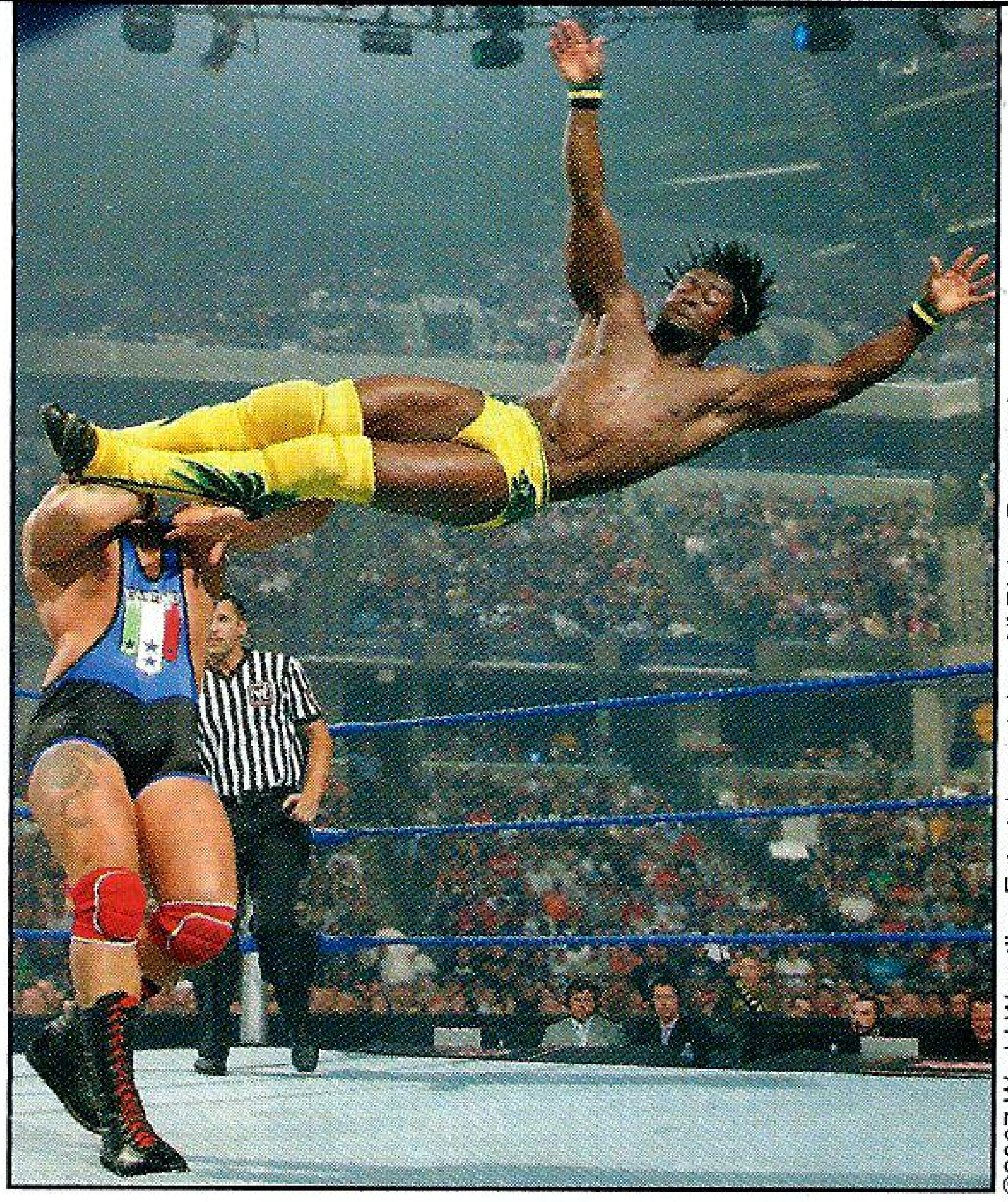
"The way I portray Jamaica in a positive way is important to me, it lets the world see me family's values, as well as me culture and just how important those t'ings are to Jamaica."

Whether it's in the air (right) or on the mat (above), Kingston is ever-mindful of representing Jamaica with a high-energy, impactful effort each time out.



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have to do to get to the top?

Q: Yes, exactly. You got from the first group to the second in a hurry. But is it a harder step to get from the midcard to the top, in your opinion?

A: It only get harder as you go along. That's why I t'ink ECW was a huge steppingstone for me after FCW. I got a chance to get some exposure and prove meself. But I know I've still got a ways to go before I'm ready to push for the top. The way I see it, you've got two choices. You can let it intimidate you or you can let it motivate you. There's another Jamaican saying, "The first water him pass, him wash himself." In other words, take advantage of the very next opportunity when it's there.

Q: You've referenced a couple of Jamaican proverbs, so I think now is an appropriate time to ask you about the attention that's been paid to you because of your home nation, Jamaica. You are WWE's first Jamaican superstar and you seem very delighted to hold that title. What is it about being from Jamaica that makes you so proud?

A: I t'ink people need to understand something, Jamaican people are a proud people. It may be just a small island to you, but it is our home. For me to go out and become the first-ever Jamaican born WWE superstar, well, I couldn't have asked for anyt'ing better. There are a lot of stereotypes out there and I'm glad I can go out, work hard, and make a name for meself. Usain Bolt made people take notice of Jamaica, shattering sprint records at the Olympics. I want to do the same in this sport. The way I portray Jamaica in a positive way is important to me, it lets the world see me family's values, as well as me culture and just how important those t'ings are to Jamaica.

Q: How did you make the decision to get into the wrestling business?

A: It was somet'ing I t'ought about for a long time. I was involved in amateur wrestling in school, which of course is totally different from pro wrestling, but a lot of us enjoyed watching WWE. I always loved watching the moves they did, besides the promos and the characters. So it was always in me mind. After I finished college, I worked a regular job for a while, but me mind was elsewhere. I'm also blessed with pretty good athleticism, although by no means does this business come easy to me. It's a challenge every singe day, and I love it. I never regret the decision to get involved in wrestling. As they say in Jamaica, "Everyt'ing irie." ☐

editors' roundtable

Special stipulation matches are going too far

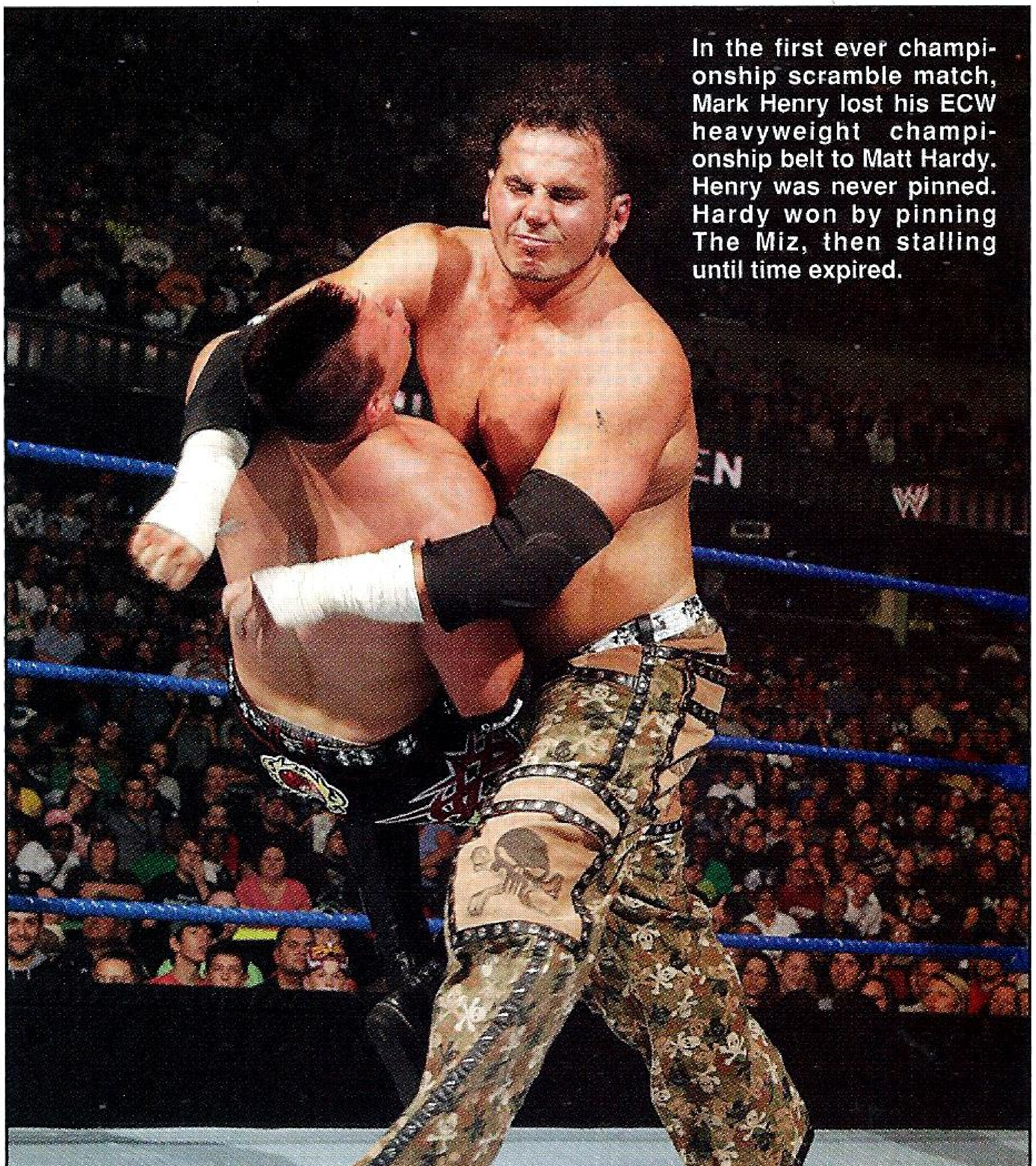
> **"At the end of the day, isn't that a wrestling promoter's ultimate goal—to entertain the fans? Whatever the convoluted stipulation, if it produces a good match, isn't that enough?"**
>
> **—Stu Saks**

SPECIAL STIPULATIONS matches have been part of pro wrestling seemingly as long as the ring itself has been. No-disqualification, lumberjack, and, of course, the ever-popular steel cage match have all been around for decades. And, when done sparingly, most fans would agree the right stipulation could introduce an additional level of excitement and drama into any bout.

But have stipulation matches gone too far? In recent months, Total Nonstop Action has been widely criticized—even by its own talent—for relying too heavily on these special matches to the point that it has become rare to see a standard one-on-one, one fall match on a TNA pay-per-view.

While World Wrestling Entertainment has its own signature matches—the Royal Rumble, the Hell in a Cell, the Elimination Chamber—that it features from time to time, historically, WWE has used stipulations more conservatively. But at September's WWE Unforgiven pay-per-view, not only did WWE introduce a new concept match with rules arguably more convoluted than any other, it featured the use of three so-called "championship scramble" matches on the very same night.

Have the proliferation of concept matches served to water down the impact of all stipulations, or, as fans continue to demand more entertainment for their dollar, are the innovative new match ideas simply the natural evolution of pro wrestling? Publisher Stu Saks recently invited Editor-in-Chief Frank Krewda, Senior Writer Harry Burkett, and Contributing Writer Al Castle to discuss the issue.



In the first ever championship scramble match, Mark Henry lost his ECW heavyweight championship belt to Matt Hardy. Henry was never pinned. Hardy won by pinning The Miz, then stalling until time expired.

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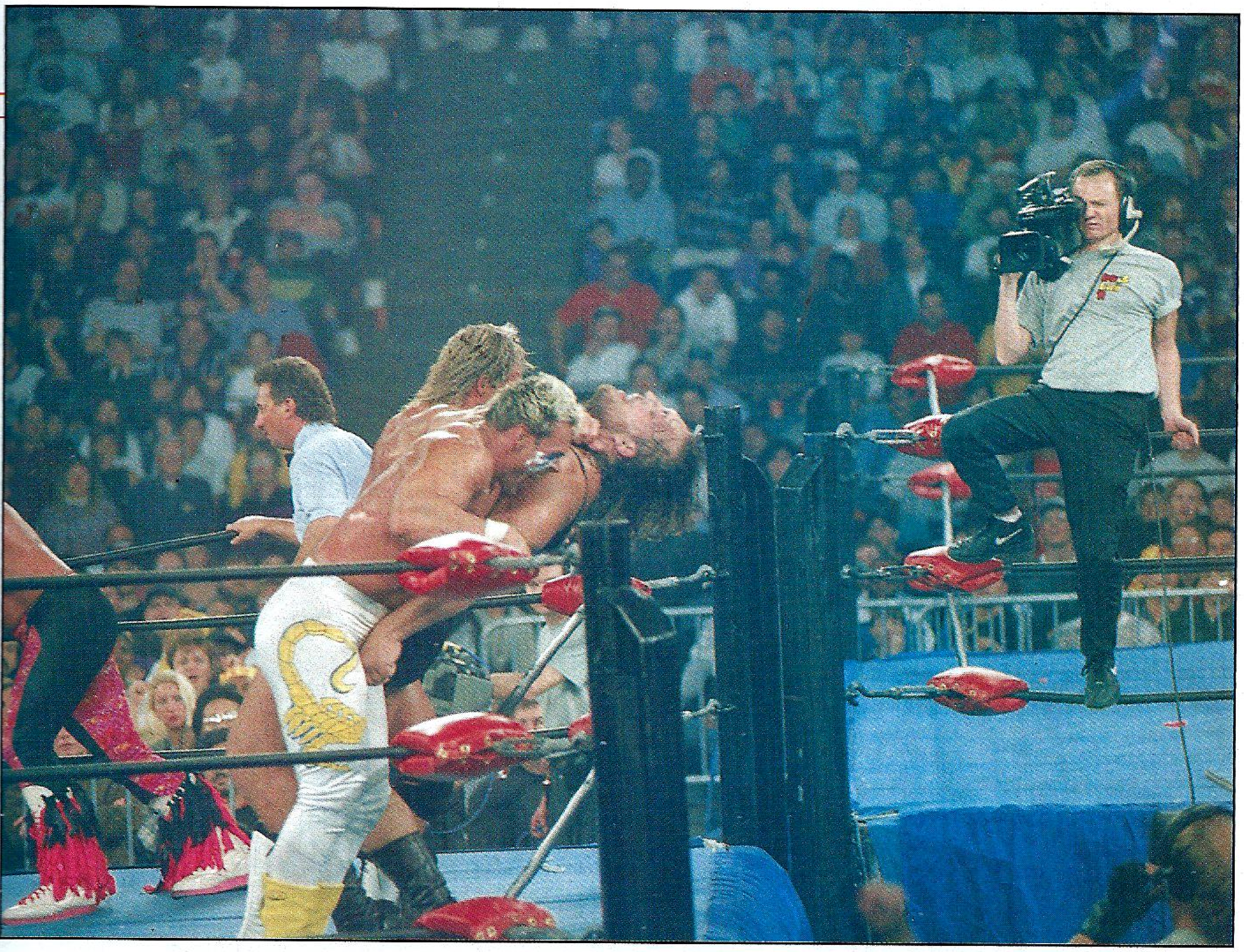
STU SAKS: All right, let's just start by talking about the three championship scramble matches at WWE's recent pay-per-view, Unforgiven. What did everybody think of the execution of what most people would agree was a pretty elaborate concept?

AL CASTLE: I liked a lot of the action in the three matches, but I



"World War 3" was a WCW creation in which 60 competitors used three rings in a battle royal. These matches were confusing, hard to watch, and even harder to photograph. Senior Writer Harry Burkett feels that despite their flaws, these types of events are integral to pro wrestling's evolution.

think that was in spite of the scramble rules, not because of them.

FRANK KREWDA: Same here. I'm still trying to figure out exactly what the rules were. Heck, I'm not sure WWE completely knows. Is Triple-H a 13-time world champion now or not?

HARRY BURKETT: I think you guys are being a bit too hard on the concept. For my money, the scramble idea was, at the least, well-executed, if not completely well-conceived.

SAKS: I think I'd fall right in the middle of all you guys. There's no doubt there was some good action in the three matches, even if it was sometimes hard to wrap your head around the rules. But at the end of the day, isn't that a wrestling promoter's ultimate goal—to entertain the fans? Whatever the convoluted stipulation, if it produces a good match, isn't that enough?

CASTLE: Not for me. I think there are other factors to consider in a match besides its entertainment value—maybe even more so. Integrity of championships for one. I mean, what does it do to the lineage of the different championships to have them change hands what seemed like a dozen times within a 20-minute match? Buddy Rogers would roll over in his grave.

BURKETT: But none of those title changes were official.

CASTLE: Then why did they keep referring to each wrestler who scored a pinfall as "current World champion"?

BURKETT: They were the "current" champs, but not officially recognized as such.

KREWDA: You're making my head hurt, guys. I think just the fact that we're having this discussion tells you all you need to know about the "scramble" concept. I mean, it shouldn't take this much effort to decipher whether someone won a championship in a match or not. And that goes for a lot of these so-called "concept" matches. Wrestling matchmakers have simply gotten too smart for their own good.

CASTLE: Absolutely. And the inevitable side effect of so many gimmick matches is that they take away from the effectiveness of a standard match, which should be just that—the standard. There needs to be a compelling reason to stray from that, beyond, "We need something to sell a few extra buys for a pay-per-view." There was no

> **"The inevitable side effect of so many gimmick matches is that they take away from the effectiveness of a standard match, which should be just that—the standard."**
>
> **—Al Castle**

real reason to have one of those scramble matches, let alone three on the same show.

BURKETT: Well, that may be true, but I'll give WWE the benefit of the doubt in experimenting with a new concept. There's definitely something to be said for innovating the way matches are contested. Some ideas will take hold, and others won't. But if it weren't for that kind of creativity, we wouldn't have matches like the Royal Rumble, War Games, and the Elimination Chamber—and I think we can all agree those matches have produced some pretty memorable moments. If coming up with those ideas means having to sit through the occasional three-ring "World War 3" battle royal, then it's a small price to pay.

SAKS: But I don't think any of us disagree that some concept matches work. The question is whether there are simply too many of them.

CASTLE: If you want an answer to that, just watch a TNA pay-per-view.

KREWDA: Tell me about it. Reverse battle royals, TerrorDome matches, King of the Mountain matches, weapons cage matches. Should I continue?

BURKETT: No, you're right. TNA tends to go a bit too far. But TNA matchmakers would tell you that they're just trying to carve out an identity for themselves that's different from WWE.

KREWDA: By confusing fans? I'm still trying to sort out that whole "Feast Or Fired" fiasco from last year. I understand TNA is trying to make a name for itself, but I don't see how company officials can't see that booking an entire card filled with cage matches is inevitably going to make each one feel less important.

SAKS: And, going back to something that Al said earlier, what does it do to championships when they change hands under such unorthodox circumstances?

BURKETT: Well, you can make the argument that a worthy champion does whatever it takes within the rules to hold on to his title—whether that means gaining a pinfall or breaking up other pinfalls in

While scramble matches have some entertainment value, they can make a mess of a promotion's championship lineage. Coming out of Unforgiven, is Triple-H now a 13-time champion? Editor-In-Chief Frank Krewda and Contributing Writer Al Castle agree that the number of title changes in a scramble match devalues the championship.

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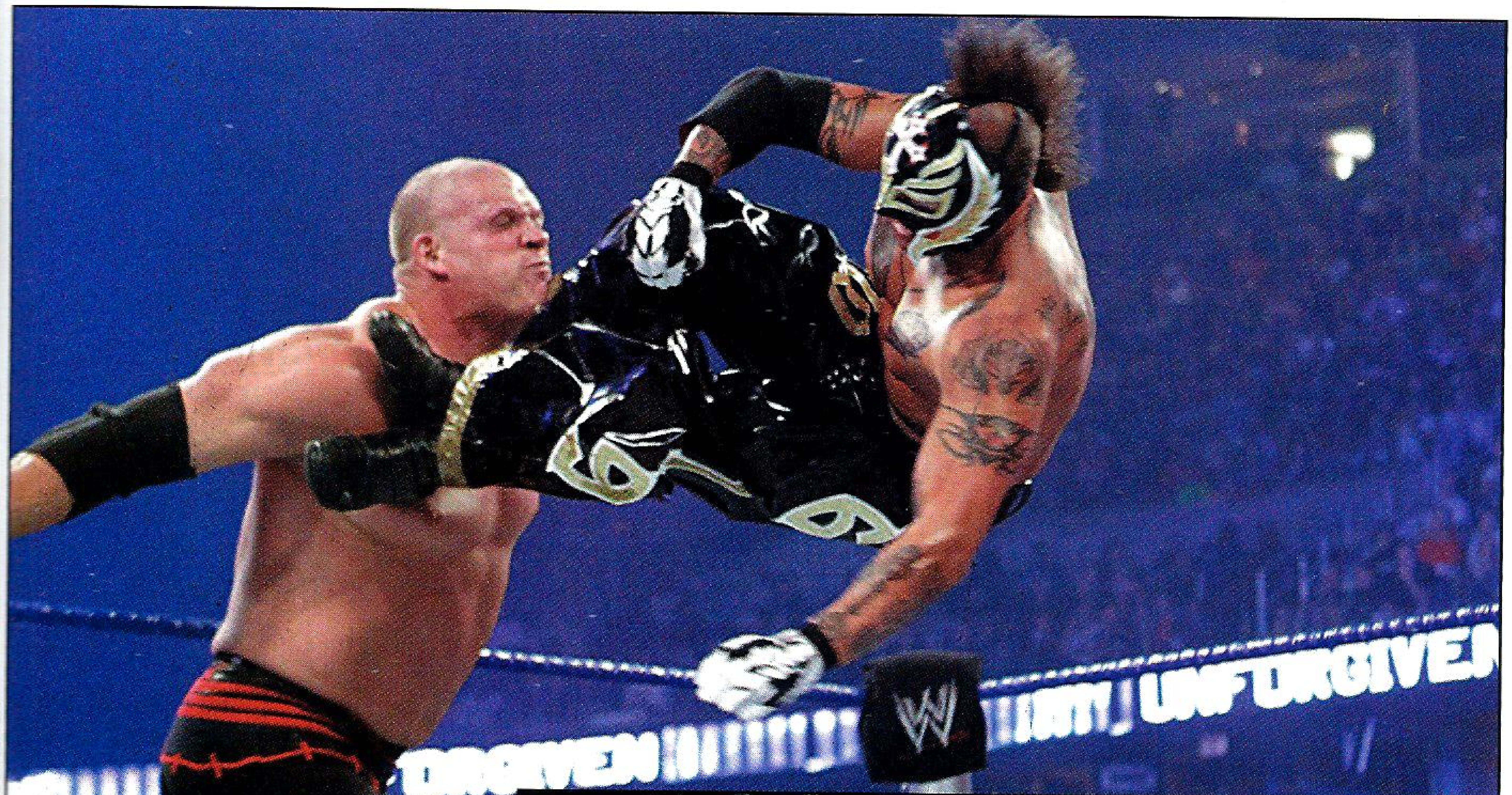

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Former World champion C.M. Punk was attacked before his scramble match at Unforgiven and wasn't even able to defend his title, which he lost without ever stepping foot in the ring. Kane and Rey Mysterio Jr. both held the belt briefly, but seemed more focused on settling their own feud than emerging with the title.

Gimmick matches weren't just the brainchildren of Vince Russo and the modern wrestling era, the NWA also had its share of gimmick matches. WarGames, for example, consisted of two teams of five members, battling between two rings, surrounded by a cage. Here, Nikita Koloff takes down Arn Anderson in a 1988 NWA WarGames match.

multi-competitor matches, like a scrambles, a triple threat, or a "Fatal Four-Way."

CASTLE: I don't know about that. I'm from the Ric Flair school of, "To be the man, you've got to beat the man." That means pinning the champ or making him submit—not beating any one of four other men in the ring.

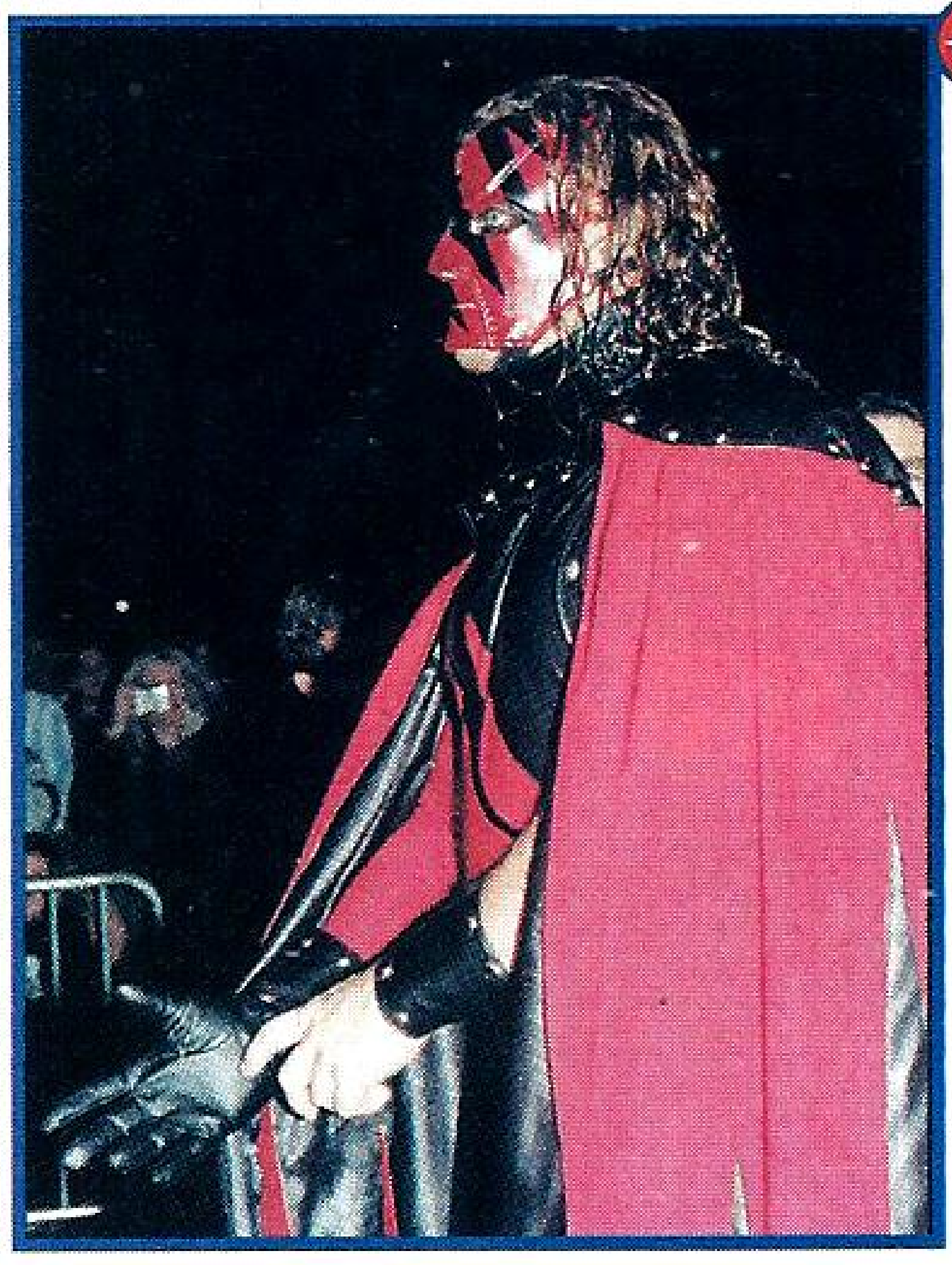
KREWDA: Amen to that. So, you guys never cleared this up for me: Is Triple-H a 13-time world champion or not?

CASTLE: Yes.

BURKETT: (Simultaneously) No.

SAKS: (Sighs.) Thanks, guys. ☐

wrestling timeline



OCTOBER 5, 1997:
After weeks of speculation, The Undertaker's half-brother, debuts to cost the "Dead Man" his "Hell In A Cell" match with Shawn Michaels for the European championship at the Bad Blood: In Your House pay-per-view.

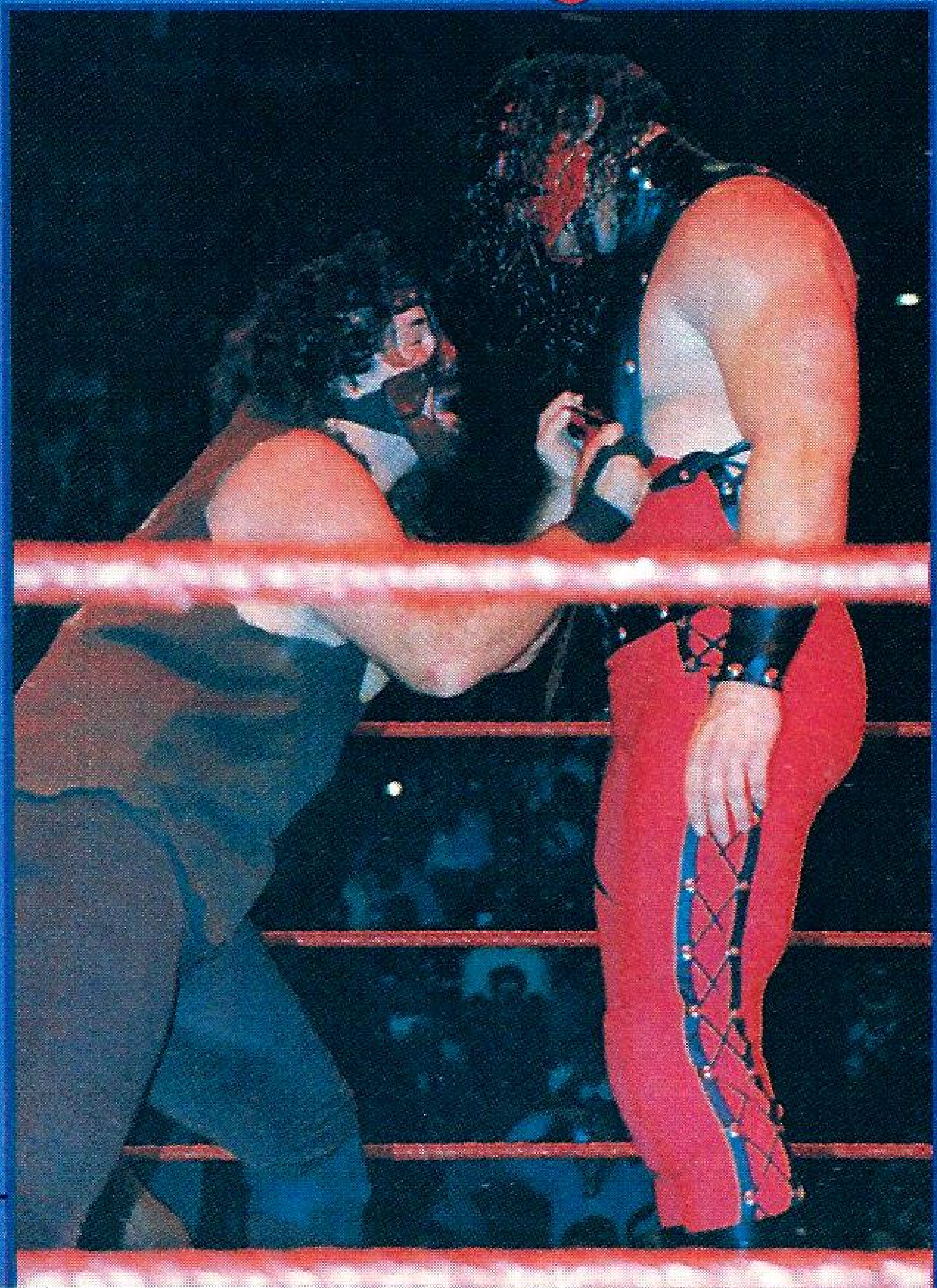
JANUARY 18, 1998:
In hopes of enticing his brother into a feud, Kane costs The Undertaker the WWF championship, locks him in a casket, and sets it ablaze at the Royal Rumble.

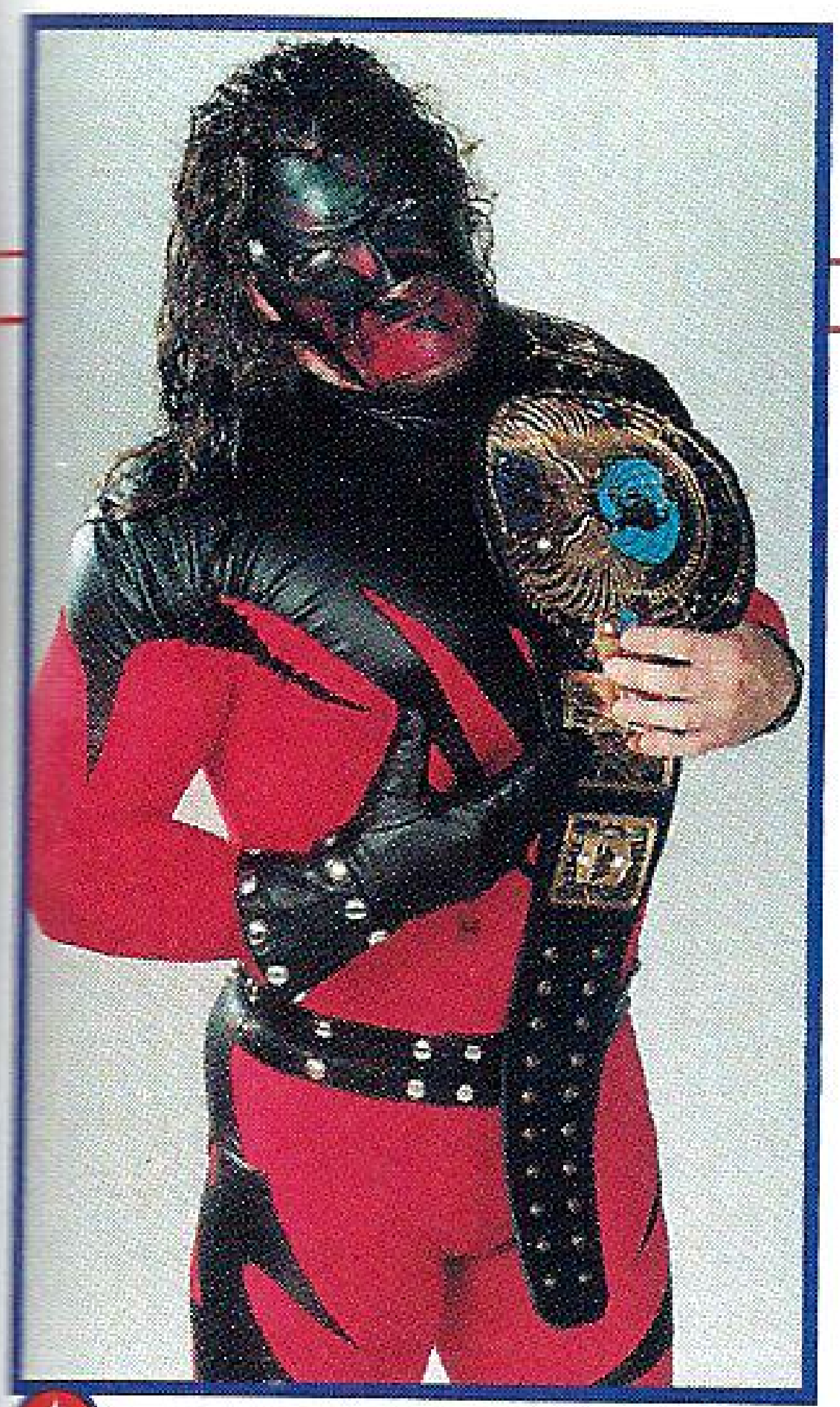
APRIL 26, 1998:
Big brother once again gets the upper hand when The Undertaker defeats Kane—by setting his arm on fire—in an "Inferno Match" at Unforgiven.

APRIL 26, 1967:
The man who would become Kane through a series of horrific events was born in Madrid, Spain.

NOVEMBER 9 1997:
Kane defeats Mankind at Survivor Series in his first in-ring action for WWF.

MARCH 29, 1998:
Kane gets what he longed for in a match with The Undertaker at WrestleMania XIV. Unfortunately, he would become merely a number in 'Taker's impressive winning streak at the event.





Kane

***Inside Wrestling* journeys back in time to examine the career of a superstar who has left a major imprint on the sport**

JUNE 28, 1998:
Part of the company for less than a year, Kane captures the top prize, winning the World championship from "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin in a "First Blood" match at King of the Ring.

JUNE 29, 1998:
Kane loses the title to Austin one night later on Raw.

SEPTEMBER 27, 1998:
In a strange ending, both Kane and The Undertaker end up defeating Austin for the WWF World championship at Breakdown. The title was vacated due to the confusion.

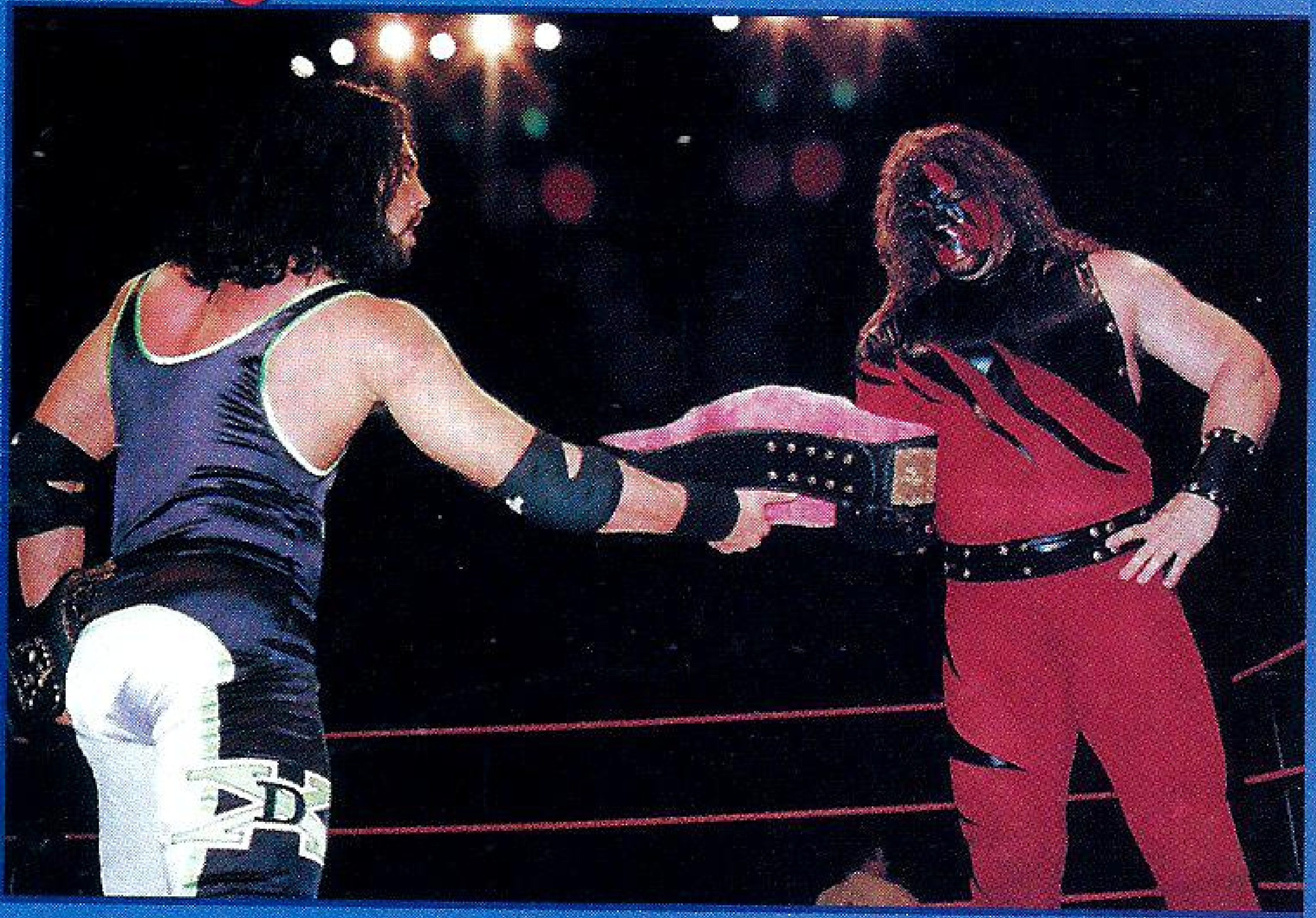
FEBRUARY 14, 1999:
Kane, now a member of Mr. McMahon's Corporation, teamed with Chyna to defeat former DeGeneration X partners X-Pac and Triple-H at WWF's St. Valentine's Day Massacre pay-per-view.

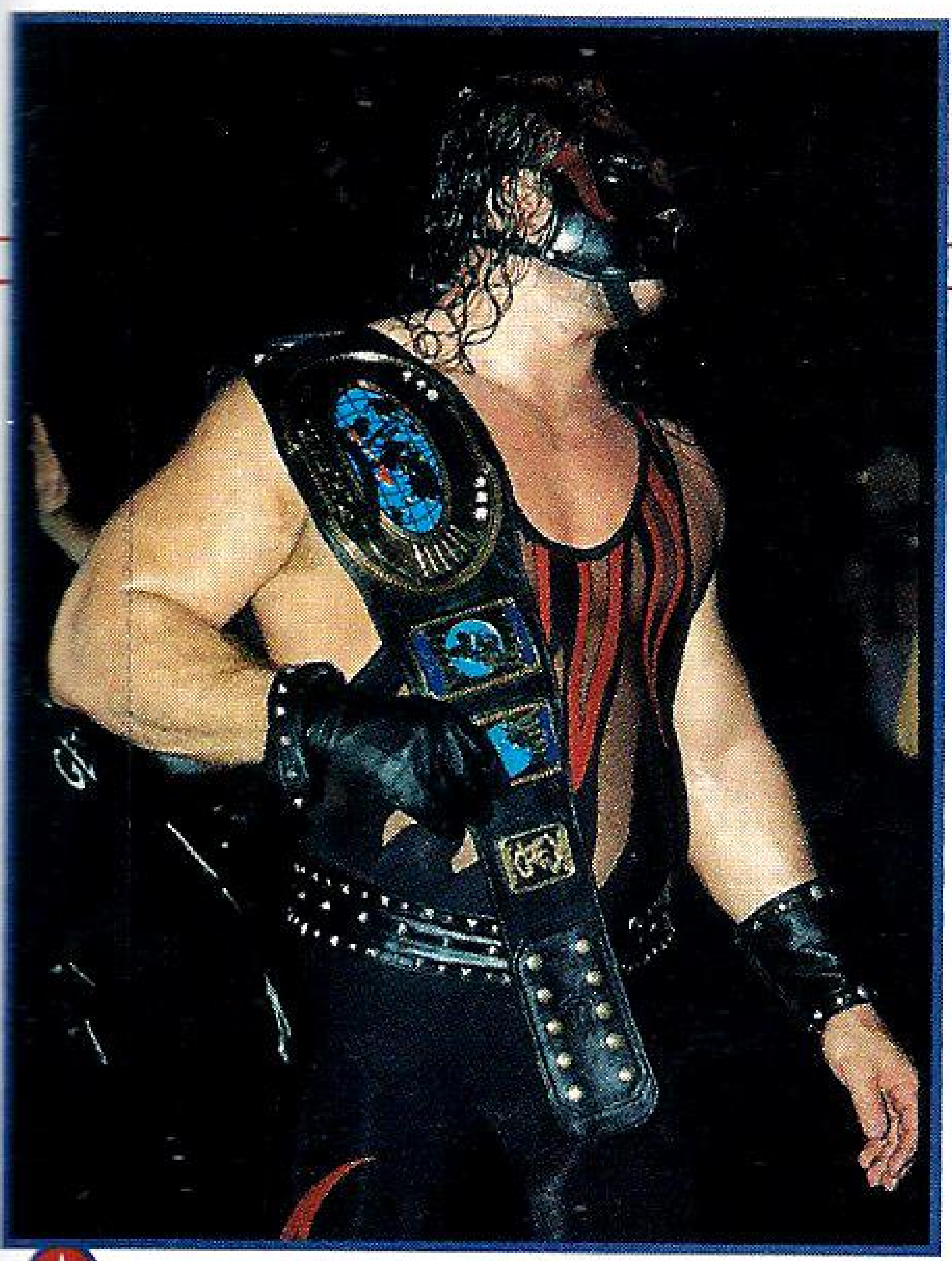
MARCH 28, 1999:
The "Big Red Machine's" affiliation with both Chyna and The Corporation was short-lived. Chyna turned against Kane and helped Triple-H win their match at WrestleMania XV.

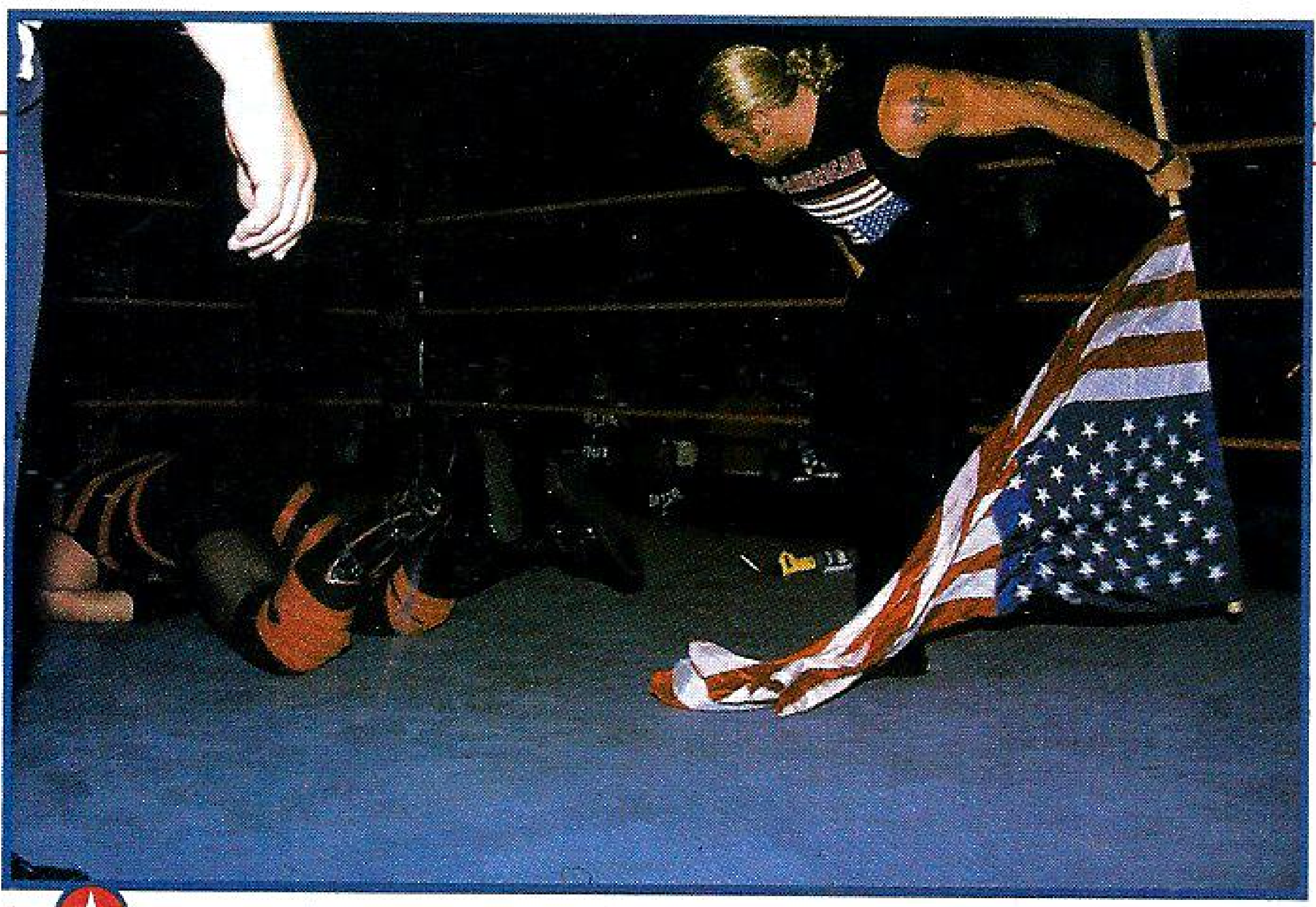
APRIL 5, 1999:
Kane wins his third WWF World tag team championship with X-Pac on Raw, making the heartache of being tossed aside by The Corporation a little easier.

AUGUST 22, 1999:
Unable to get past his brother once again in a significant match, Kane and X-Pac lose the WWF World tag team straps to The Undertaker and The Big Show at SummerSlam.

F. NEIL
SERGIO IS GAY!!!







MAY 20, 2001:
Kane wins his first Intercontinental championship by beating Triple-H in a chain match at the WWF's Judgment Day pay-per-view.

AUGUST 9, 2001:
Adding more gold to his collection, Kane teams with The Undertaker to ward off the ECW and WCW invaders. The duo wins the WCW tag team title in the process on Smackdown.

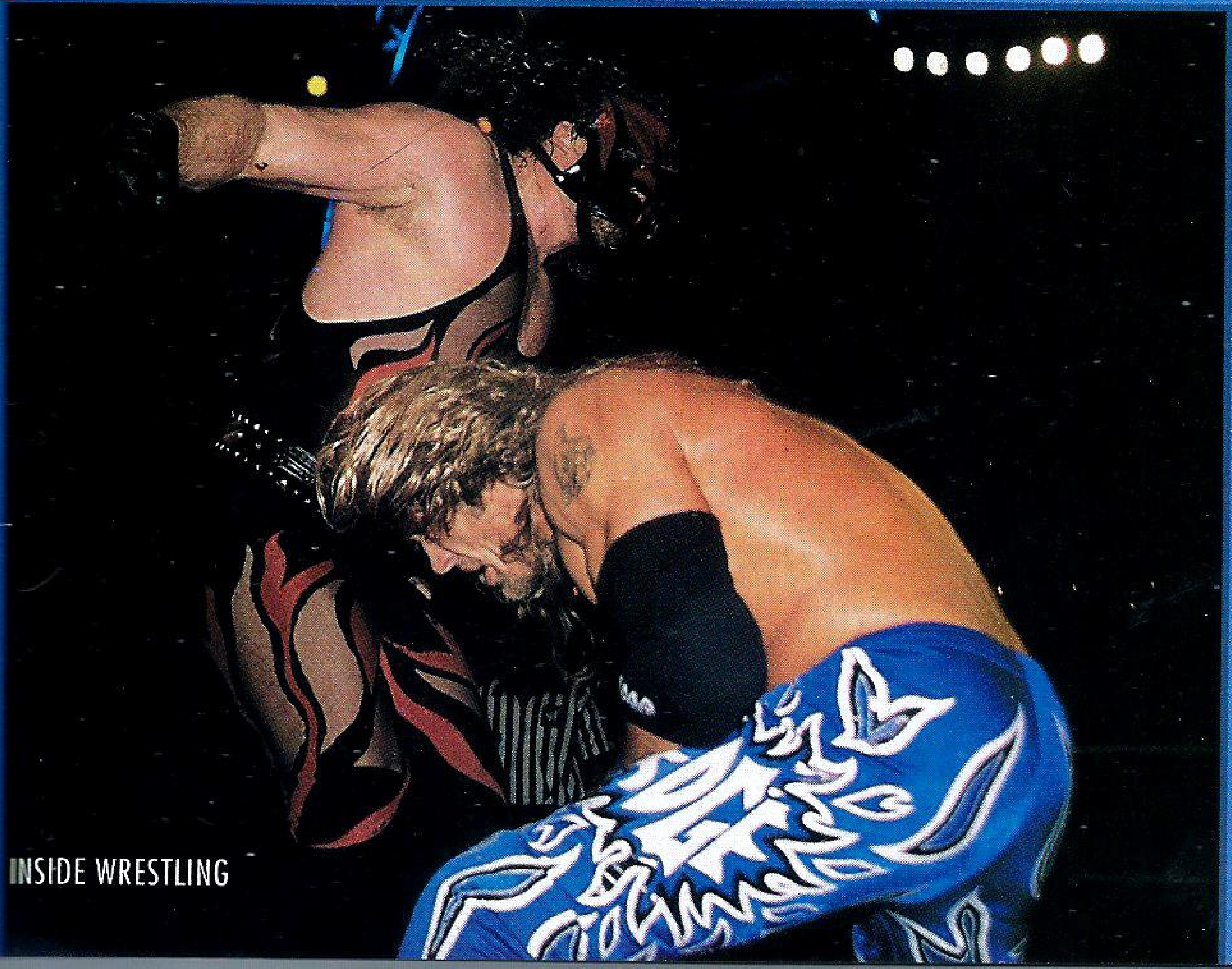
AUGUST 26, 2002:
Kane returns to rousing cheers after four months of rehabbing a biceps injury to prevent the Un-Americans from burning the U.S. flag on an episode of Raw.

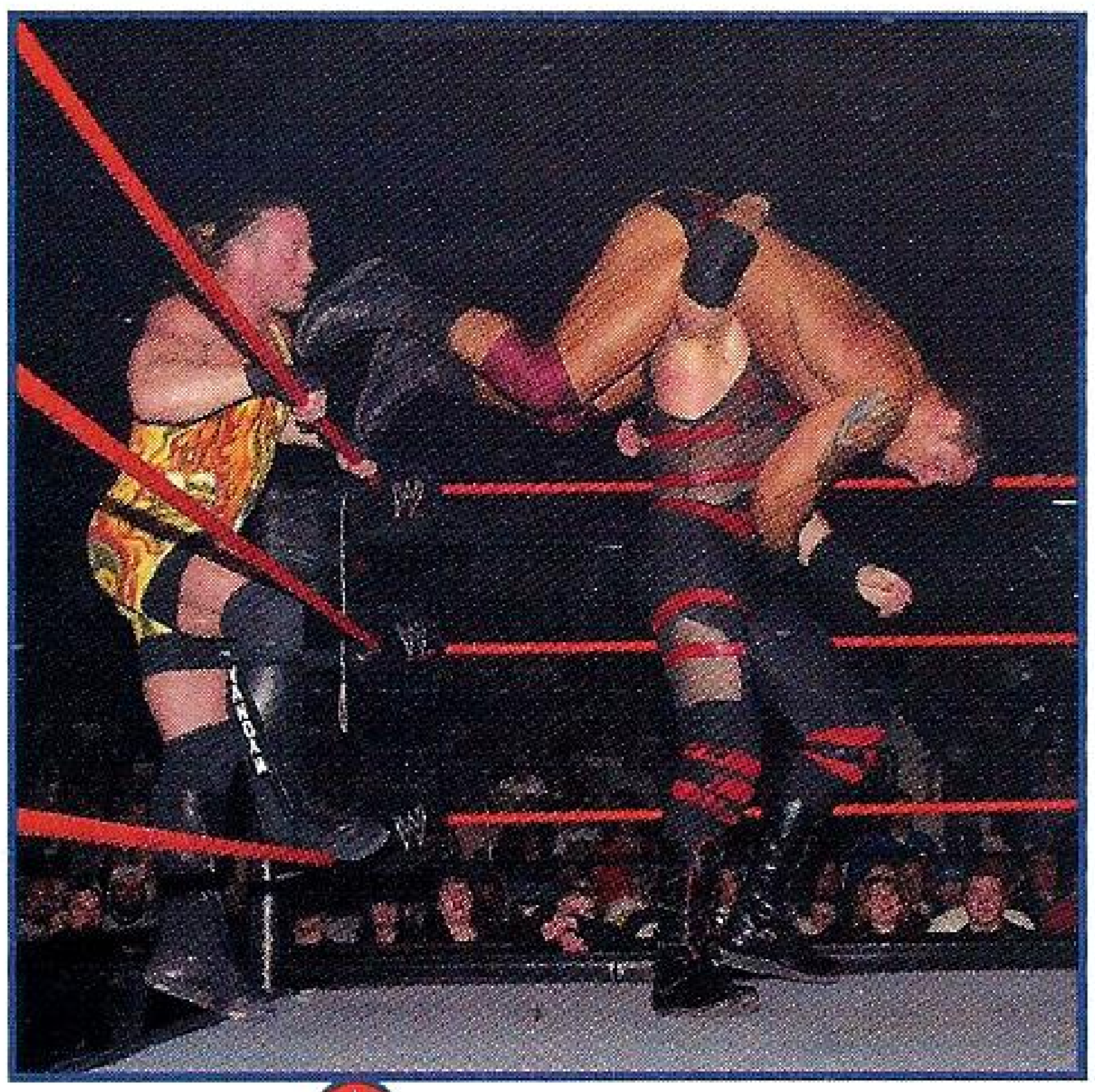
SEPTEMBER 23, 2002:
The start of a great week for Kane sees him win the WWE World tag team title, along with partner The Hurricane, from Lance Storm and Christian on Raw.

APRIL 17, 2001:
Once again in the good graces of his big brother, Kane and The Undertaker defeat Edge and Christian to win the WWF World tag team title. They would lose the gold 12 days later.

NOVEMBER 18, 2001:
In a somewhat traditional Survivor Series match, Kane is part of the WWF contingent that defeats the ECW-WCW invasion group headed-up by "Stone Cold" Steve Austin and Shane McMahon.

APRIL 8, 2002:
Kane is defeated by X-Pac in a "Falls Count Anywhere" match when the NWO interferes. X-Pac leaves with Kane's mask, although fans cannot see his mangled appearance just yet.





SEPTEMBER 30, 2002: Ending the week on an even higher note, Kane captures the Intercontinental title for the second time, this time beating Chris Jericho on the following week's Raw.

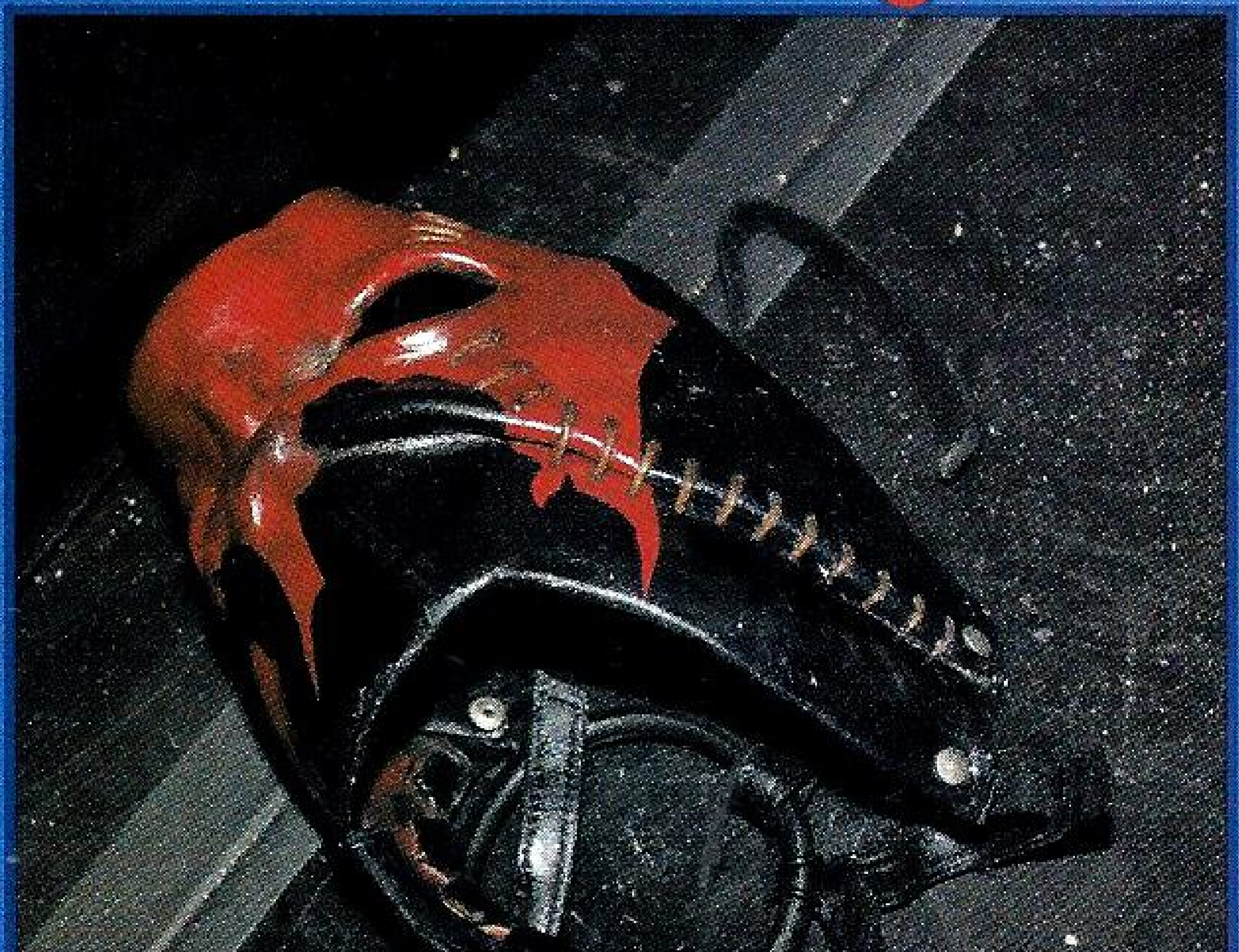
MARCH 31, 2003: Kane and Rob Van Dam win the WWE World tag team title on Raw in a three-way elimination match. It's Kane's eighth time holding the title.

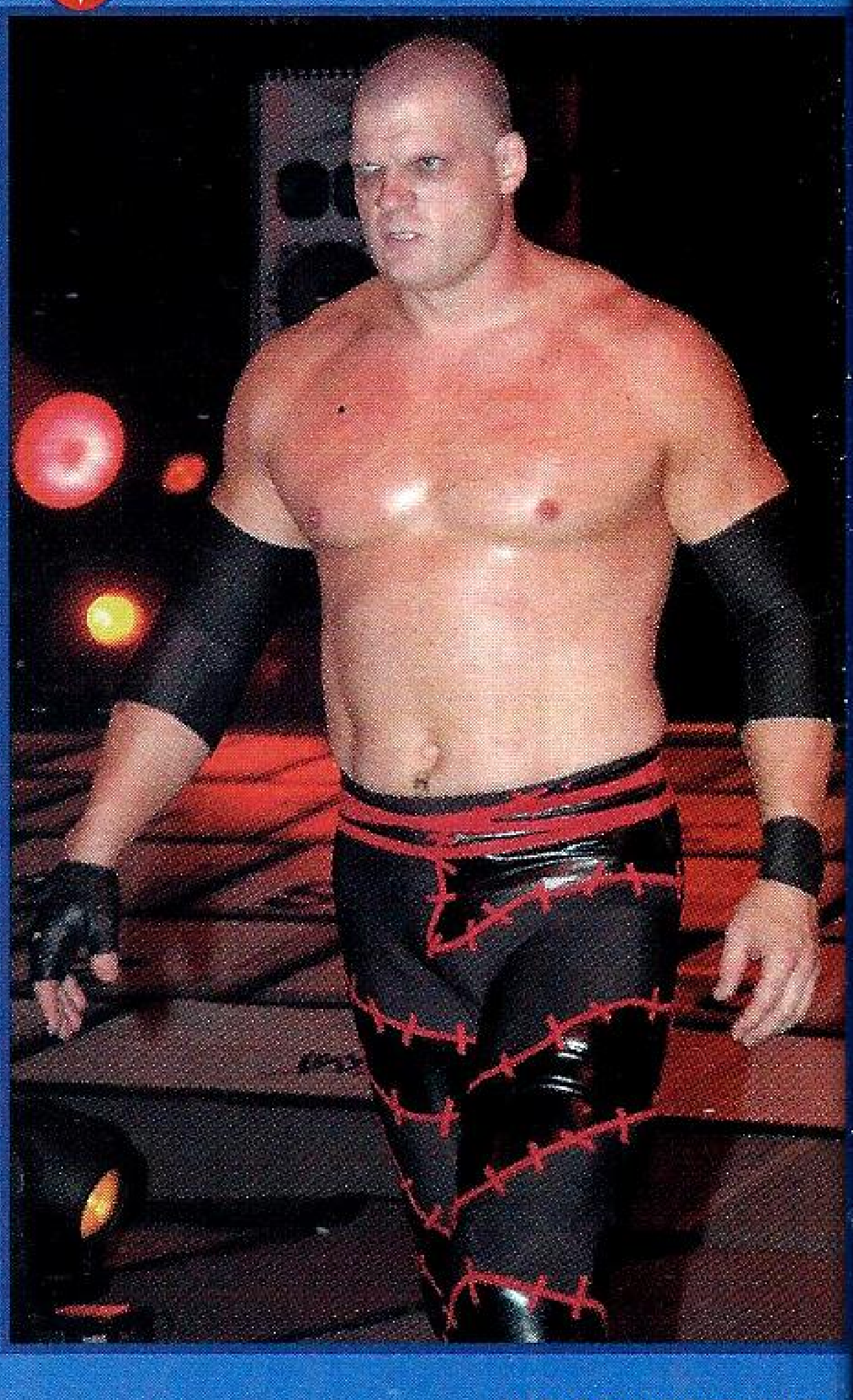
JULY 14, 2003: Not appreciating the line of questioning he was receiving, Kane douses Jim Ross with gasoline and sets him on fire on Raw.

OCTOBER 14, 2002: Winning a race to the bottom, Triple-H accuses Kane of having an improper relationship with Katie Vick, a girl from the "Big Red Machine's" sordid past.

JANUARY 27, 2003: Teaming with Rob Van Dam, Kane once again has his mask ripped off during a match on Raw. They lose to Triple-H and Batista because of the incident.

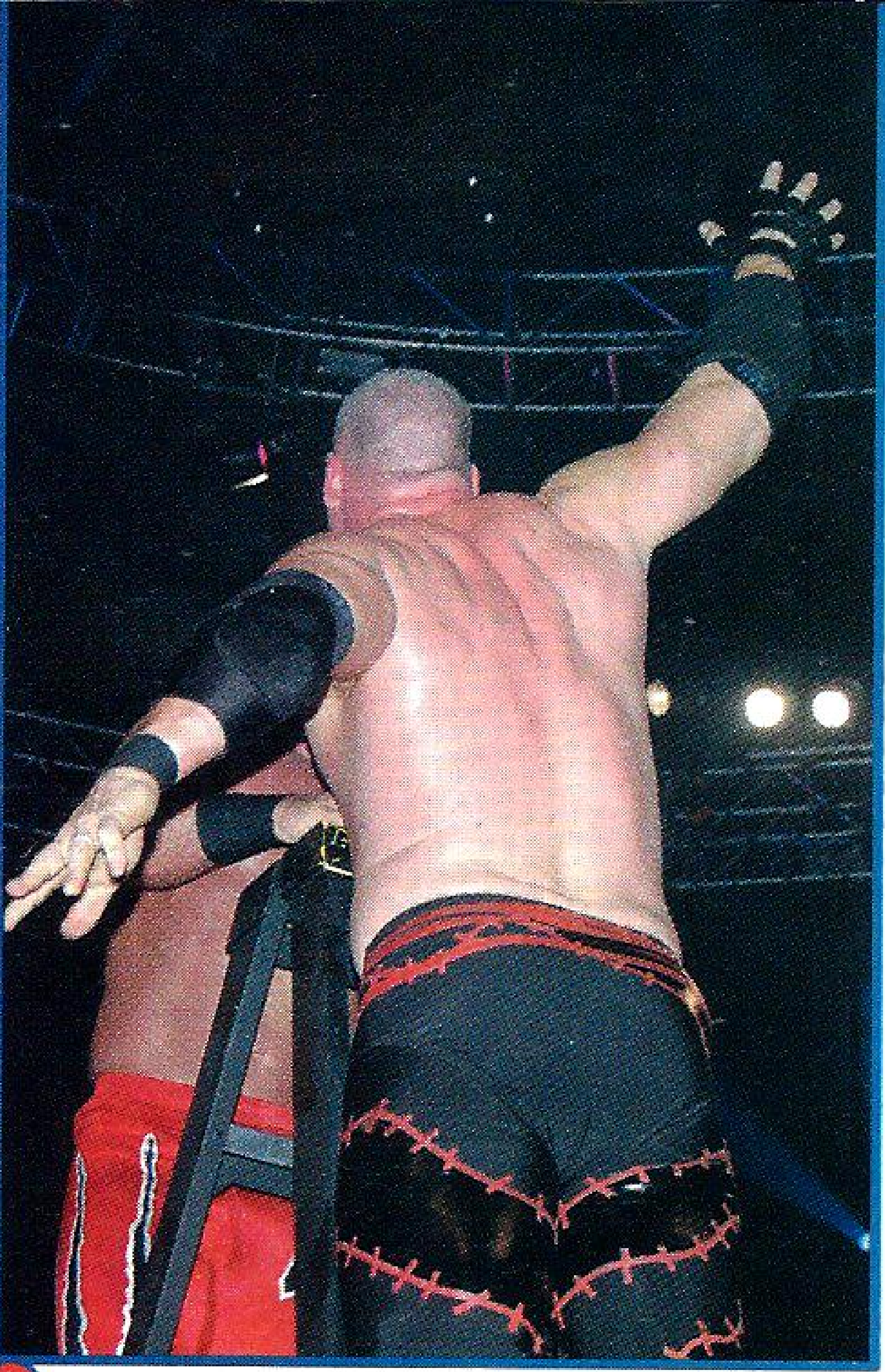
JUNE 23, 2003: After losing a title vs. mask match on Raw, Kane is unmasked revealing a relatively normal looking psychopath who would go on a rampage over the coming months.





NOVEMBER 16, 2003:
Kane beats Shane McMahon in an "Ambulance Match" at Survivor Series before assisting Vince in defeating The Undertaker in a "Buried Alive Match" later in the night.

JUNE 21, 2004:
Lita is the latest victim of Kane's attention when it turns out that his aggressive pursuit of the former WWE women's champion has resulted in her pregnancy with his hell spawn.

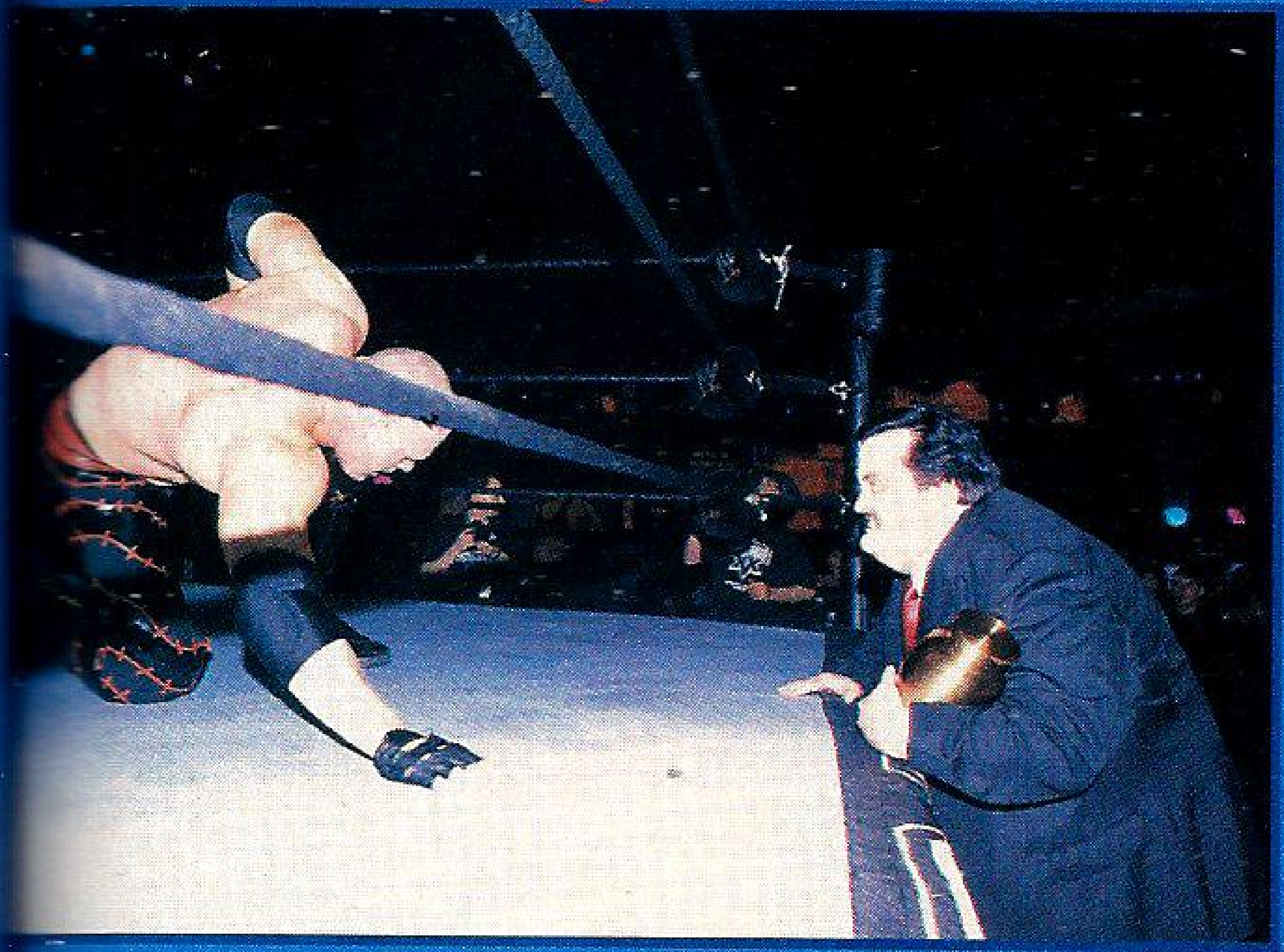


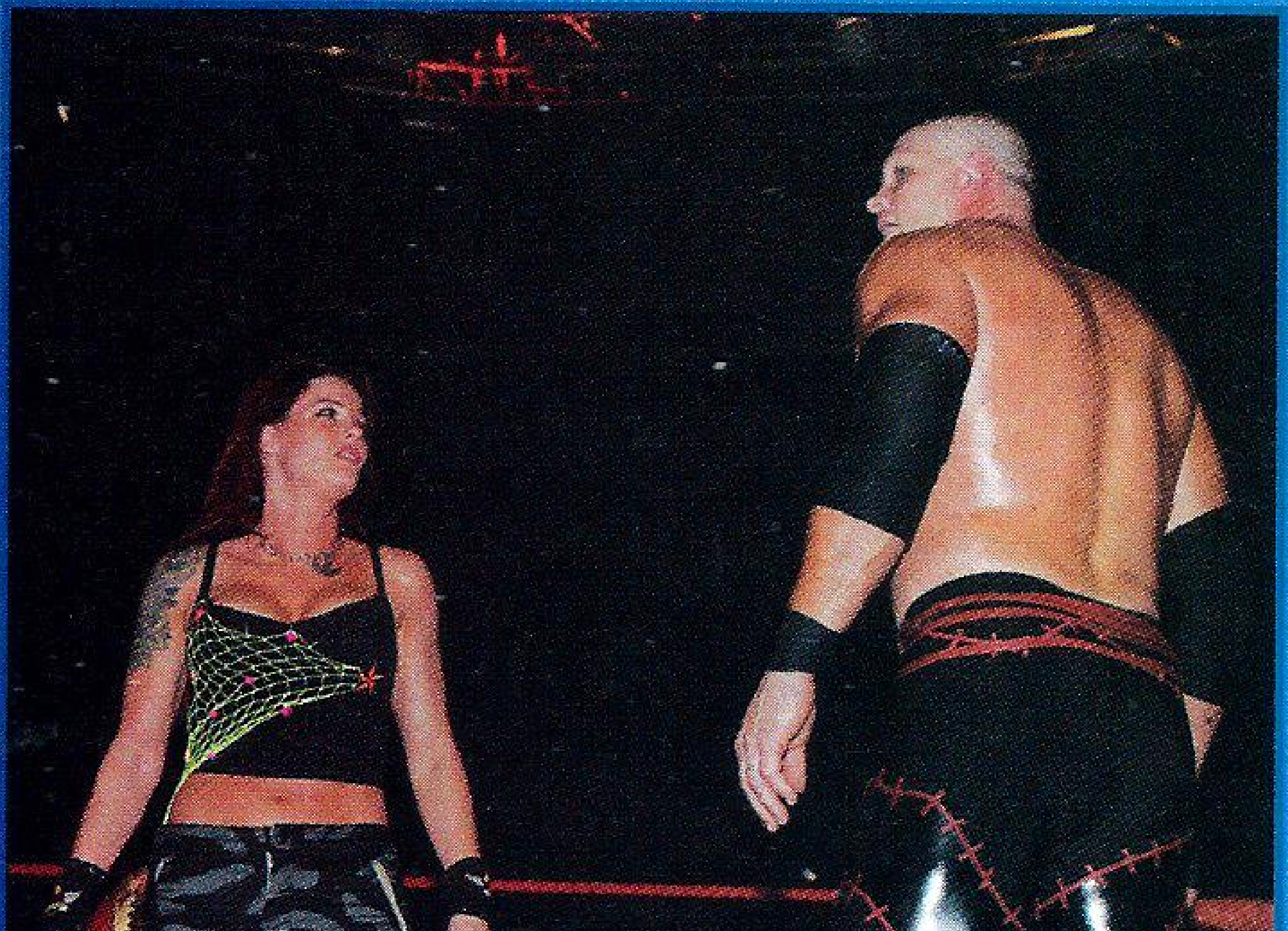
APRIL 3, 2005:
At WrestleMania 21, Kane participates in the first ever "Money In The Bank" ladder match, which was won by Edge.

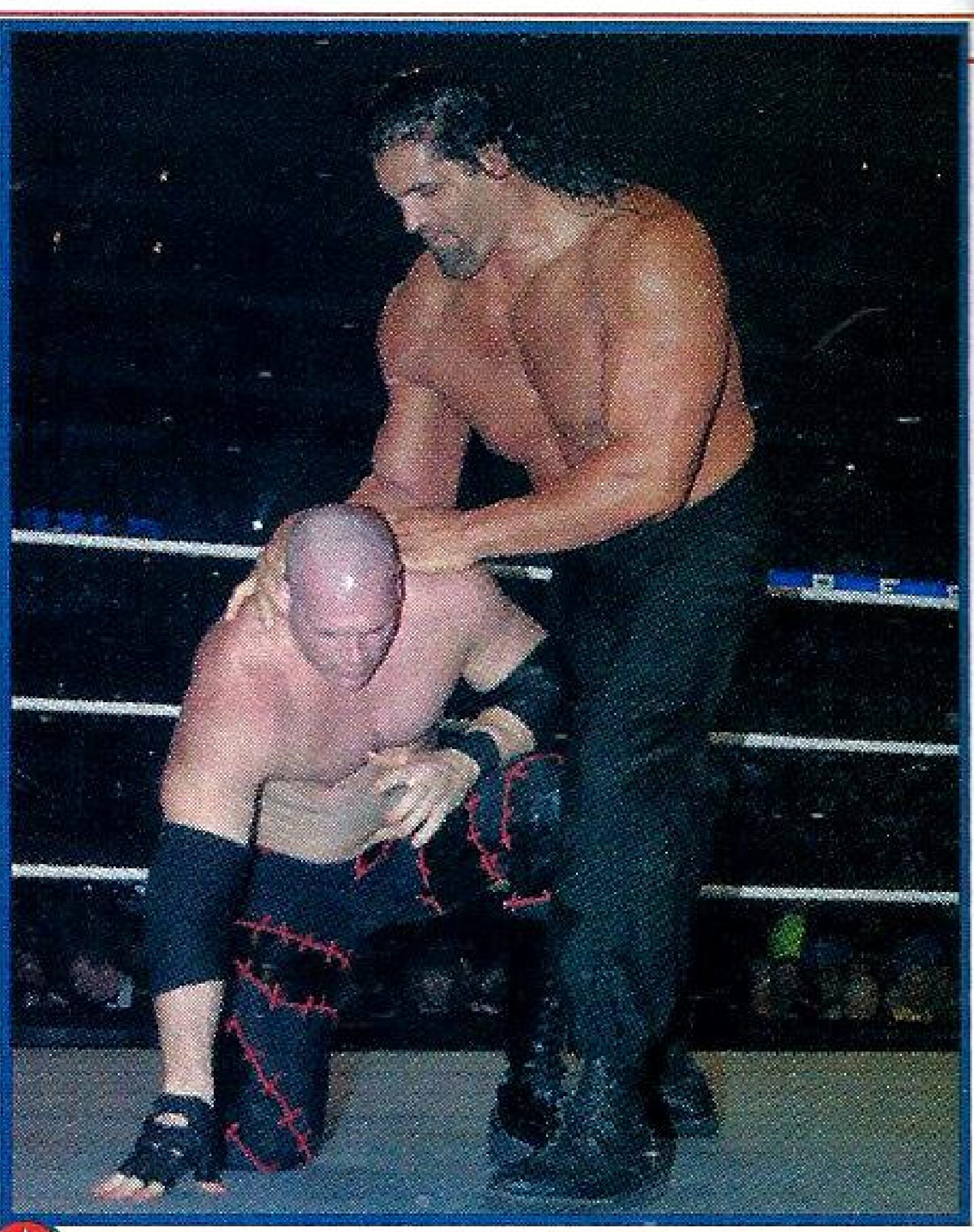
MARCH 14, 2004:
After suffering a series of strange events that clearly have him on edge, Kane loses to a returning Undertaker—with Paul Bearer—at WrestleMania XX.

AUGUST 23, 2004:
Kane and Lita are married on Raw in a typical WWE wedding, complete with chokeslams, black gowns, and a wall of fire.

JUNE 20, 2005:
Lita was involved in yet another wedding on Raw, only this time her former husband Kane is the man trying to stop her nuptials to Edge, to no avail.







JANUARY 8, 2006:
Kane is a participant in the "Elimination Chamber" match, won by John Cena, at New Year's Revolution.

JUNE 26, 2006:
A brief, yet odd, angle comes to an end when Kane punishes and then discards an impostor of himself, who had been playing mind-games with the real "Big Red Machine" in prior weeks.

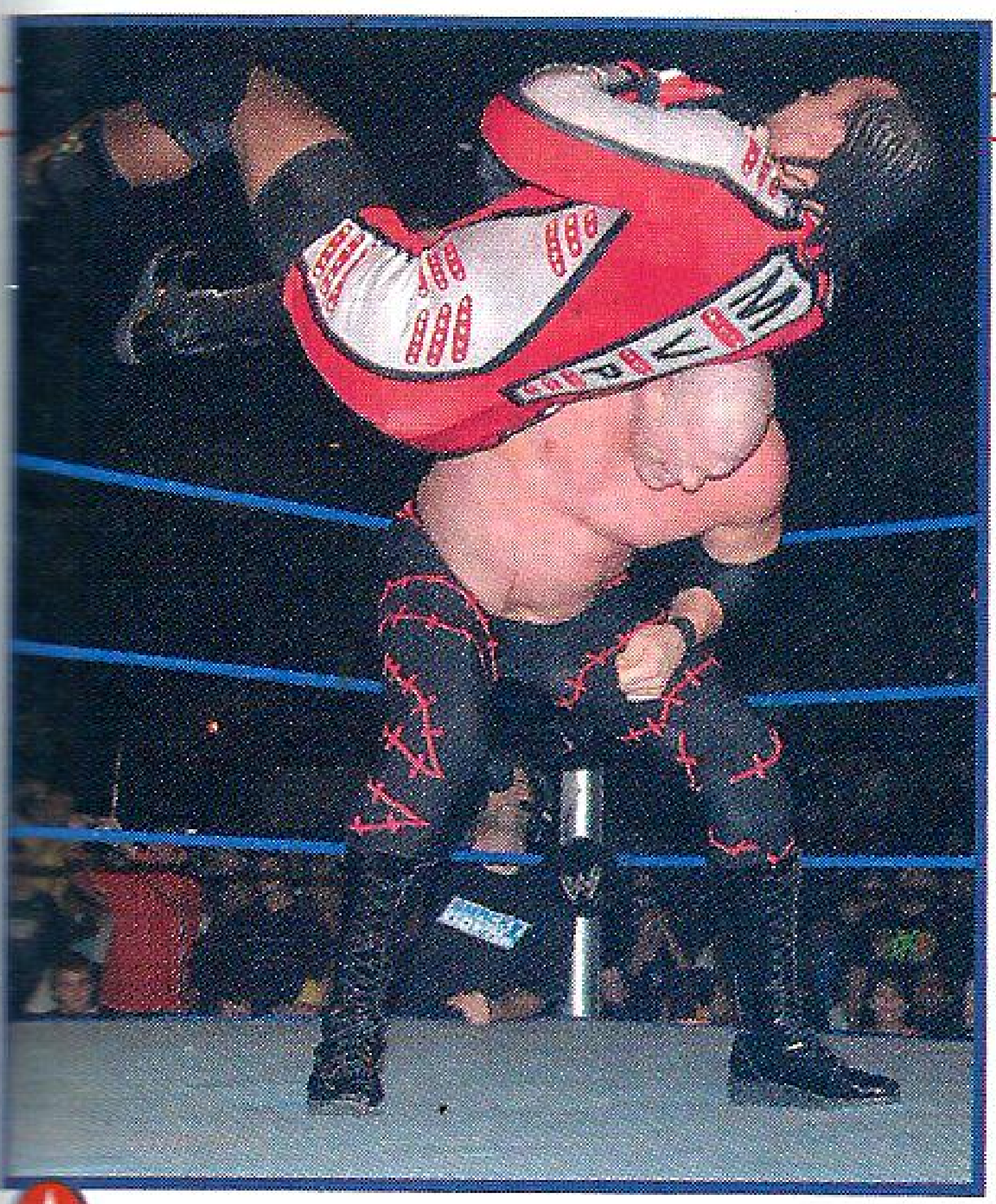
APRIL 1, 2007:
Kane falls to The Great Khali in an "Interpromotional Grudge Match" at WrestleMania 23 in Detroit, Michigan.

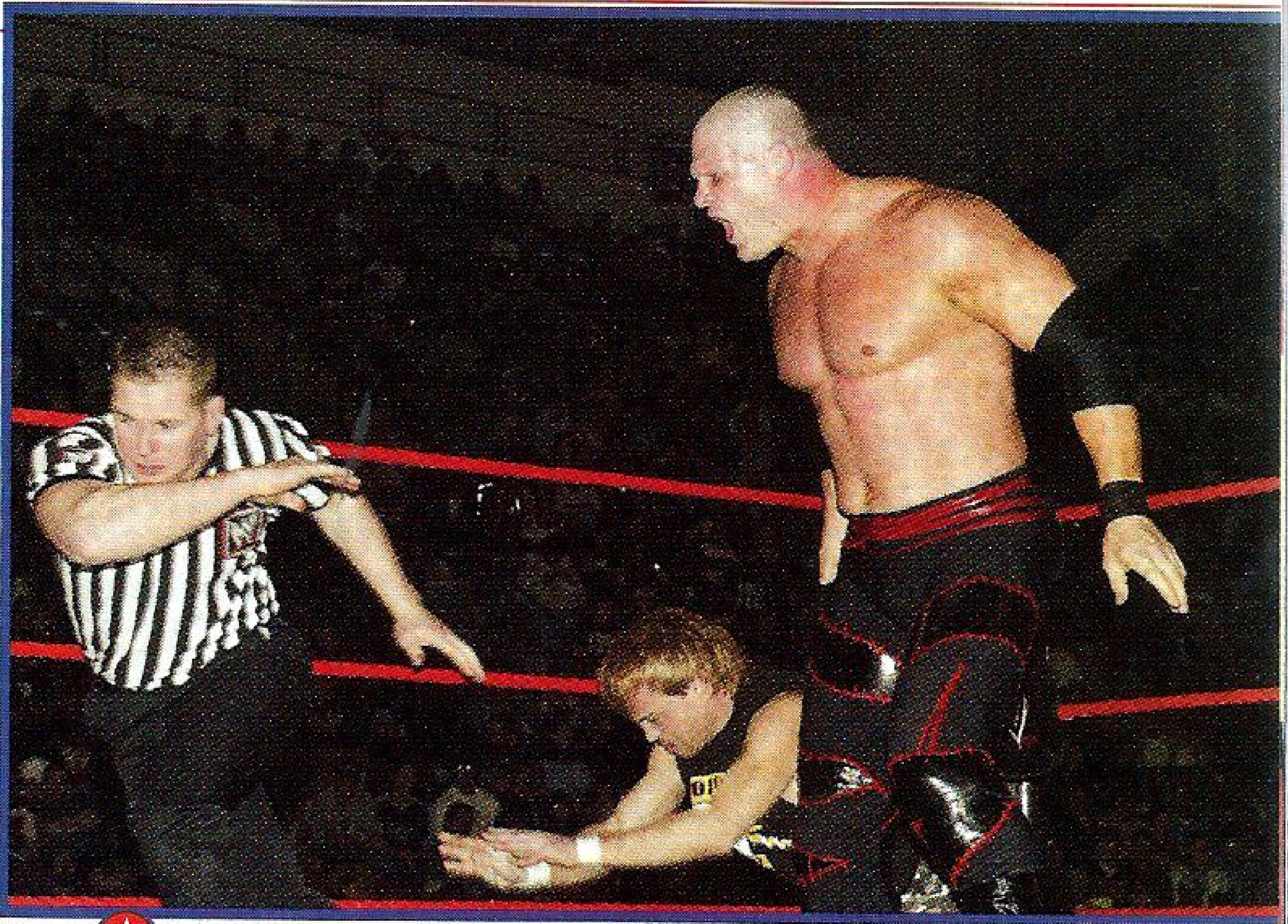
NOVEMBER 1, 2005:
Teaming with The Big Show, Kane wins his ninth WWE World tag team championship by defeating the tandem of Lance Cade and Trevor Murdoch at Taboo Tuesday.

APRIL 2, 2006:
With their pairing reaching a tenuous point, Kane and The Big Show retain the WWE World tag team title at WrestleMania 22 over Carlito and Chris Masters.

DECEMBER 17, 2006:
Finally mastering the element that made him who he is, Kane defeats MVP in an "Inferno Match" at Armageddon.

JUNE 3, 2007:
At ECW's One Night Stand, two men who never were a part of the brand—Kane and Mark Henry—fought in a lumberjack match won by "The World's Strongest Man."





OCTOBER 28, 2007:
In a highly unsatisfying result, Kane defeats U.S. champ MVP at Cyber Sunday by countout and does not win the championship as a result.

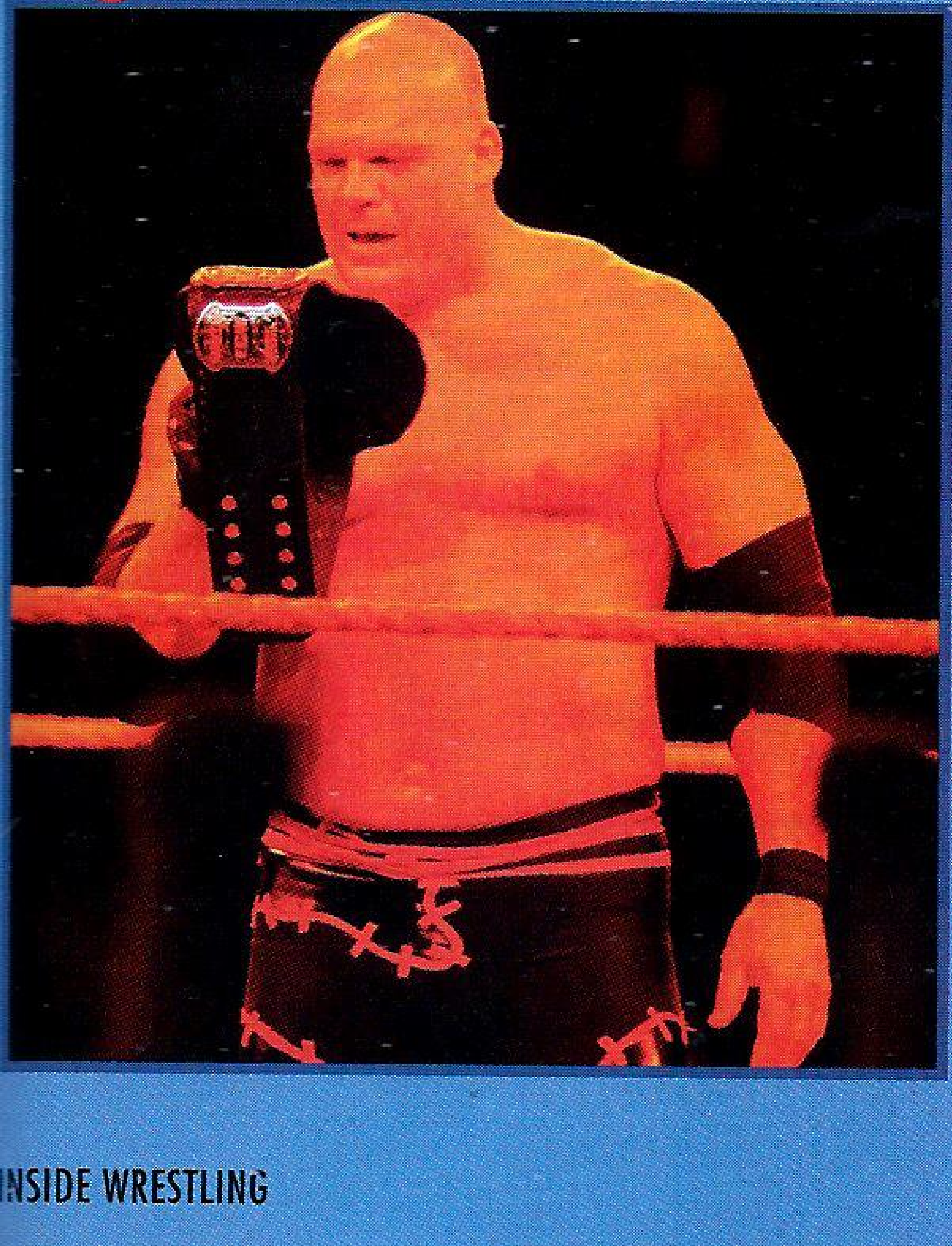
JUNE 23, 2008:
As part of the WWE Draft, Kane is moved from ECW to Raw and takes the latter's championship with him.

JULY 7, 2008:
On Raw, Kane snaps and destroys everyone and everything around him screaming the query, "Is he dead or alive?"

MARCH 30, 2008:
Kane not only wins a shot at the ECW championship in a 24-man pre-show battle royal, he then goes on to capture the gold during WrestleMania 24 by defeating Chavo Guerrero Jr. in nine seconds.

JUNE 29, 2008:
Only six days after moving to Raw, Kane loses the ECW championship at Night of Champions to Mark Henry in a three-way match that also involves The Big Show.

AUGUST 11, 2008:
After weeks of speculation and confusion, Kane reveals to whom he is referring by pulling Rey Mysterio Jr.'s mask from a burlap bag he had been carrying around.



ROLL CALL OF CHAMPIONS

For period ended September 26, 2008

Championships highlighted in bold on the "Roll Call Of Champions" have changed hands since our previous issue. The information under the championship listing indicates the date that champion won the title, who the former champion was, and where the match took place.

ALL JAPAN INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TAIYO KEA & MINORU SUZUKI
(June 28, 2008; from Joe Doering & Keiji Muto; Osaka, Japan)

ALL JAPAN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: RYUJI HIJIKATA
(April 29, 2008; from Silver King; Aichi, Japan)

ALL JAPAN TRIPLE CROWN CHAMPION: SUWAMA
(April 29, 2008; from Kensuke Sasaki; Nagoya, Japan)

AMERICAN WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: LARRY ZBYSZKO
(February 5, 2008; awarded the title by AWA Superstars of Wrestling; Minneapolis, MN)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: FREDERICK OF HOLLYWOOD
(July 26, 2008; from Glen Osbourne; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION MID-ATLANTIC CHAMPION: CHASE DEL MONTE
(May 10, 2008; defeated Ace Darling, Robere Shields, and Aden Chambers in a four-way match; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: BRYAN & MATT LOGAN
(December 1, 2007; from Max Von Bauer & Kermon the German; Newark, DE)

ECW HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: MATT HARDY
(September 7, 2008; defeated Mark Henry, Finlay, The Miz, and Chavo Guerrero Jr. in a Championship Scramble match; Cleveland, OH)

FCW FLORIDA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: SHEAMUS O'SHAUNESSY
(September 18, 2008; from Jake Hager; Tampa, FL)

FCW FLORIDA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: SEBASTIAN SLATER & JOE HENNIG
(September 11, 2008; from Nic Nemeth & Gavin Spears; Tampa, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: GO SHIOZAKI
(August 23, 2008; from Erick Stevens; Crystal River, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: JASON BLADE & KENNY KING
(November 9, 2007; from Jay & Mark Briscoe; Crystal River, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO FLORIDA HERITAGE CHAMPION: SAL RINAURO
(November 9, 2007; from Erick Stevens; Crystal River, FL)

IWA: MID-SOUTH HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: DINGO
(June 20, 2008; from Chuck Taylor; Sellersburg, IN)

IWF HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KEVIN KNIGHT
(May 8, 2008; from Travis Blake; West Paterson, NJ)

IWGP HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KEIJI MUTO
(April 27, 2008; from Shinsuke Nakamura; Osaka, Japan)

IWGP INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TOGI MAKABE & TORU YANO
(February 17, 2008; from Giant Bernard & Travis Tomko; Tokyo, Japan)

IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: LOW KI
(September 21, 2008; from Tiger Mask IV; Kobe, Japan)

NWA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: ADAM PEARCE
(September 20, 2008; from Brent Albright; Philadelphia, PA)

NWA WORLD JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: MIKE QUACKENBUSH
(May 11, 2007; from Tiger Mask IV, Portage, IN)

NWA WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: PHOENIX STAR & ZOKRE
(January 10, 2008; from Karl Anderson & Joey Ryan, Las Vegas, NV)

NWA WOMEN'S CHAMPION: MsCHIF
(April 27, 2008; from Amazing Kong, Cape Girardeau, MO)

OVW HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: ANTHONY BRAVADO
(June 25, 2008; from Nick Dinsmore; Louisville, KY)

OVW SOUTHERN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: APOC & VAUGHN LILAS
(September 10, 2008; from Darriel Kelly & Josh Lowry; Louisville, KY)

OVW TV CHAMPION: RUDY SWITCHBLADE
(August 27, 2008; from J.D. Michaels; Louisville, KY)

OVW WOMEN'S CHAMPION: SERENA
(July 24, 2008; from The Baroness; Louisville, KY)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA CHAMPION: CHRIS HERO
(July 6, 2008; from Human Tornado; Reseda, CA)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: MATT & NICK JACKSON
(August 31, 2008; from Jimmy Jacobs & Tyler Black; Reseda, CA)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN CHAMPION: KENSUKE SASAKI
(September 6, 2008; from Takeshi Morishima; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: BRYAN DANIELSON
(September 14, 2008; from Yoshinobu Kanemaru; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: AKITOSHI SAITIO & BISON SMITH
(May 23, 2008; from Naomichi Marafuji & Takeshi Sugiura; Tokyo, Japan)

RING OF HONOR CHAMPION: NIGEL McGUINNESS
(October 6, 2007; from Takeshi Morishima; Edison, NJ)

RING OF HONOR TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: KEVIN STEEN & EL GENERICO
(September 19, 2008; from Tyler Black & Jimmy Jacobs; Boston, MA)

SHIMMER CHAMPION: MsCHIF
(April 26, 2008; from Sara Del Rey; Berwyn, IL)

TNA WOMEN'S CHAMPION: TAYLOR WILDE
(June 24, 2008; from Awesome Kong; Orlando, FL)

TNA WORLD CHAMPION: SAMOA JOE
(April 13, 2008; from Kurt Angle; Lowell, MA)

TNA WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: ROBERT ROODE & JAMES STORM
(August 10, 2008; defeated Homicide & Hernandez, Trenton, NJ)

TNA X CHAMPION: SHEIK ABDUL BASHIR
(September 14, 2008; defeated Petey Williams and Consequences Creed in a triple-threat match; Oshawa, Ontario, Canada)

WWE INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION: SANTINO MARELLA
(August 17, 2008; from Kofi Kingston in an intergender tag team match that also involved Mickie James and Beth Phoenix; Indianapolis, IN)

WWE WORLD CHAMPION: CHRIS JERICHO
(September 7, 2008; defeated Batista, John Bradshaw Layfield, Kane, and Rey Mysterio Jr. in a Championship Scramble match; Cleveland, OH)

WWE WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TED DiBIASE JR. & CODY RHODES
(August 11, 2008; beat John Cena & Batista; Richmond, VA)

WWE CHAMPION: TRIPLE-H
(April 27, 2008; from Randy Orton in a "Fatal Four-Way" match that also included John Cena and John Bradshaw Layfield; Baltimore, MD)

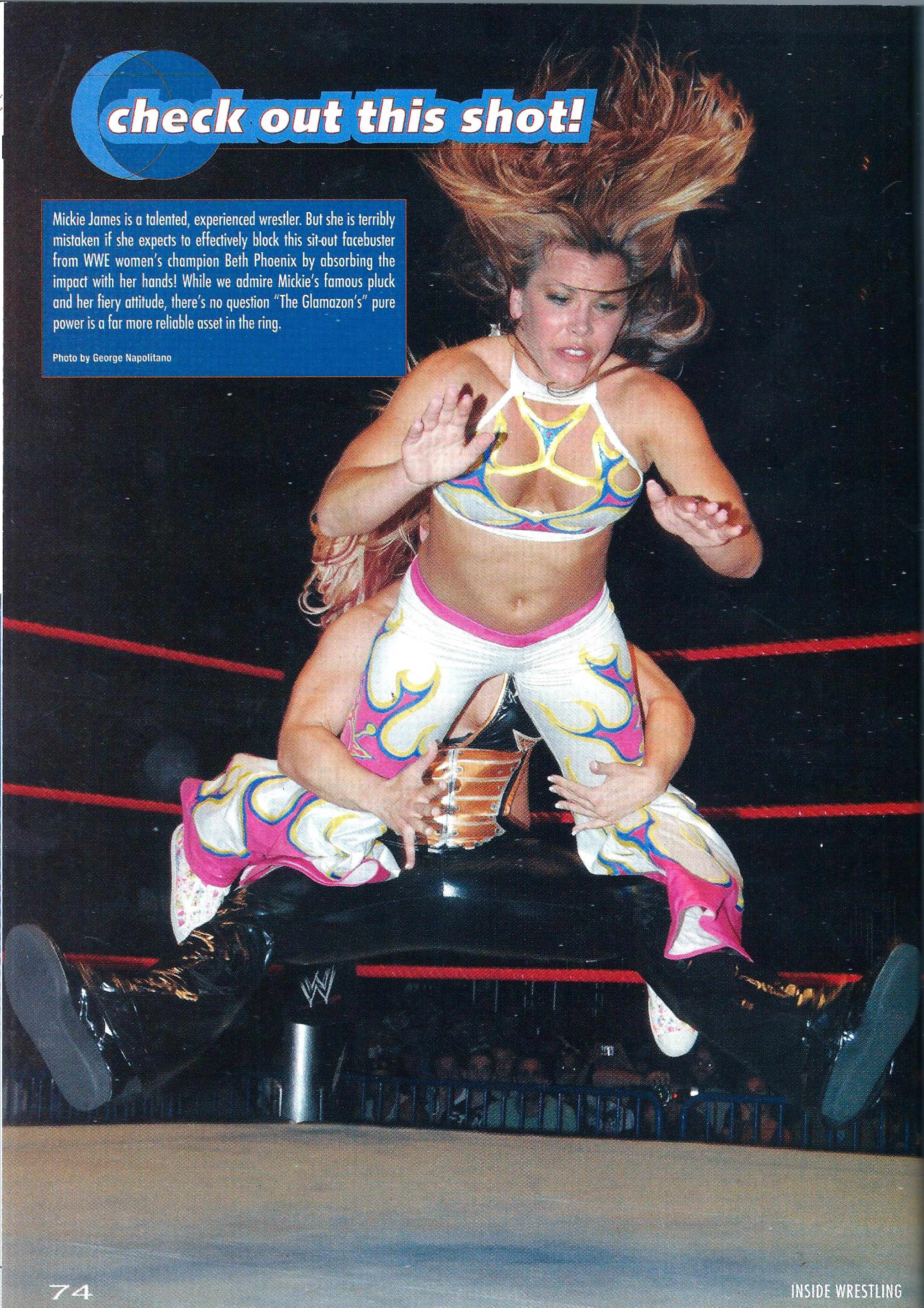
WWE TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: CARLITO & PRIMO COLON
(September 26, 2008; defeated Curt Hawkins and Zack Ryder; Columbus, OH)

WWE U.S. CHAMPION: SHELTON BENJAMIN
(July 20, 2008; from Matt Hardy; Uniondale, NY)

WWE WOMEN'S CHAMPION: BETH PHOENIX
(August 17, 2008; from Mickie James in an intergender tag team match that also featured Kofi Kingston and Santino Marella; Indianapolis, IN)

WWE DIVAS CHAMPION: MICHELLE McCOOL
(July 20, 2008; defeated Natalya to become first Divas champion; Uniondale, NY)

check out this shot!



Mickie James is a talented, experienced wrestler. But she is terribly mistaken if she expects to effectively block this sit-out facebuster from WWE women's champion Beth Phoenix by absorbing the impact with her hands! While we admire Mickie's famous pluck and her fiery attitude, there's no question "The Glamazon's" pure power is a far more reliable asset in the ring.

Photo by George Napolitano